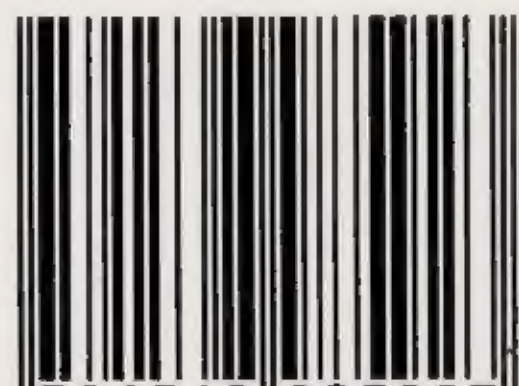


THE END

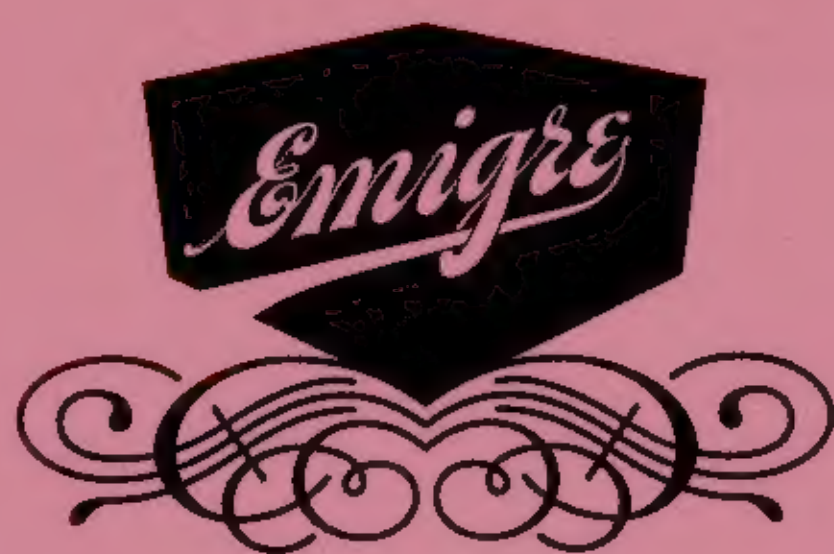
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No. 69

FINAL ISSUE.

FINAL ISSUE



THE END

EMIGRE No.69

**CO-PUBLISHED BY
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OUTRO

Everything must come to an end, and after publishing *Emigre* magazine for over 21 years, I'm both relieved and just a little bit sad to announce that #69 will be our final issue.

Publishing *Emigre* magazine has taken up almost all of my professional life as a graphic designer. It's perhaps no accident that this adventure started shortly after I arrived in California as an émigré. Entrepreneurialism is a particularly American phenomenon and while I never considered myself much of a businessman, the possibilities for DIY endeavors seemed endless. Risk taking was usually encouraged and supported in those days. A couple of guys in a garage in Menlo Park had a great idea and ran with it. And we had just launched *Emigre* #1 in 1984 when their Macintosh computer turned the graphic design world upside down. Embracing that machine and its pixelated aesthetic turned us into early explorers of a new technology, leading us to question many of the established rules of typography. We felt comfortable in that outsider position and held on to it for a long time. The rest is history.

It's a curious coincidence that *Emigre* magazine comes to an end in the same year that I'm applying for my American citizenship. After 24 years, I no longer feel much like an outsider anymore. Perhaps it's the right time to say goodbye to that idea.

It may be premature to wonder what *Emigre*'s legacy will be and how (or if) it has influenced others. Time will tell. But there's little doubt it has influenced me. Over time, the magazine came to define me. I was often introduced as "the guy

who publishes *Emigre*.” This always sounded strange to me, as if I knew what I was doing. Editing, designing, and publishing *Emigre* magazine was largely a learning experience. I still feel I’ve only scratched the surface.

It was an exciting time in graphic design. Beautiful, innovative work was being done. Heretofore unimaginable typefaces were released. Great searching essays were written. Passionate discourse took place. But looking back, what stands out most for me are the people I’ve come in contact with. We were fortunate to cross paths with some extraordinary talent—designers, educators, writers, printers, binders, students, critics, artists, friends, and foes—the list is long. This is what I will miss the most.

It is nearly impossible to thank everyone properly. There are simply too many people to list. If you’re not mentioned by name below, be assured that your contribution to *Emigre* is no less appreciated. I’m sure you know who you are.

A special thank you goes to Marc Susan and Menno Meyjes for kick-starting this adventure, and to Alice Polesky for her unwavering loyalty as she proofread every single issue of *Emigre*. Alice provided the only consistency in a magazine known to change more often than the starting lineup of the 2005 Sacramento Kings.

A huge thank you goes to Jeffery Keedy, Lorraine Wild, Kenneth FitzGerald, Anne Burdick, and Andrew Blauvelt for repeatedly choosing *Emigre* as the platform to share their passion for graphic design, and for providing the magazine’s intellectual quality while maintaining its bad boy reputation. They came to the profession of graphic design not simply to assimilate but to question and transform it.

OUTRO

Thanks also to Steven Heller, Rick Poynor, and Michael Bierut for their candid feedback on *Emigre* over the years. Perhaps unbeknownst to them, they functioned as my unofficial advisory board; their letters, emails, and phone calls never failed to separate the nonsense from the truth. I always paid close attention to both their praise and criticism of our magazine.

At Princeton Architectural Press I'd like to thank Kevin Lippert for taking on the financial burden of publishing *Emigre* in 2003, which extended the magazine's life by another six issues, and Jennifer Thompson for being so responsive to my never-ending questions about production schedules.

I also tip my hat to Liz Charman and Gail Swanlund for moving to Sacramento and injecting *Emigre* with some new ideas and creative energy in the period 1993-1995.

Furthermore, I'd like to thank everyone who's worked at *Emigre* helping us sell and distribute the magazine over the past 21 years. With fond memories I think of Patrick Li, Elizabeth Dunn, Gerry Villareal, Kurt Hobson, John Kessler, Lori Jackson, Linnea Mason, Tony Hardina, Frank Ortiz, Michael J. Kachmar, John Todd, Darren Cruickshank, Ella Cross, Kristi Burgess, Greg Rice, and Dan Offer.

Tim Starback's contribution to the *Emigre* operation warrants special mention. In 1991, Tim walked into our office with only a rudimentary knowledge of the Macintosh computer, but with noticeable spring in his step. Within time he set up our bulletin board, making *Emigre* the first foundry to sell fonts online. His job description as office manager does little justice to the multitude of responsibilities he has handled and continues to handle. Equally as willing to unload a truck of *Emigre* magazines as he is capable of solving a com-

plicated PHP problem, Tim's eagerness to take on any chore necessary to get the job done perfectly complemented our company's DIY attitude.

Most importantly, I owe much to my wife Zuzana Licko. Not only did she provide me with an unending stream of beautiful typefaces that infused the magazine with a truly original character, but her level-headed business sense kept a keen eye on the bottom line. Entrepreneurialism should not be mistaken for having some cool ideas and going out on a limb. Ideas are cheap. It takes perseverance and business acumen to turn them into something worthwhile.


Zuzana has also reminded me to tell everyone that it's only the magazine we are discontinuing. Emigre, the company, will happily move on. We have much work left to do.

Following is a behind-the-scenes look at how we got here, while our contributors and colleagues bid us farewell.


It was quite an experience.

RVDL

SIXTY-NINE SHORT STORIES



**A HISTORY OF
EMIGRE MAGAZINE
CONJURED UP BY
RUDY VANDERLANS**



1

1984

It's late at night and it's raining. I'm in the car with Menno, Marc, and Alice, and we're driving back from Palo Alto feeling depressed and angry. Our effort to squeeze funding from the fists of rich Dutch engineers who work for Bechtel did not go as expected. We wanted to start a magazine called *Dutch Punch* about Dutch artists living on the West Coast. Marc had painted a logo, a classic shield upon which a Dutch lion, wearing boxing gloves, was ready to rumble. All we needed was seed money. During the meeting, we got drunk on Dutch gin and laid out our plans. The engineers drank and laughed and then showed us the door.

Menno says, "Screw Dutch people, and screw a Dutch magazine." He's frustrated and fired up. He says our magazine should be called *Emigre*, and it should be about the global artist who juggles cultures, travels between them, and who is fluent in the cultural symbols of the world. An émigré.

Before we reach San Francisco, we launch a million ideas at each other. Menno wants to create plastic statuettes of Vladimir Nabokov, a well known émigré. Our eight-inch mascot would wear a jaunty hat and carry a rugged suitcase and stand atop a pedestal engraved with the name *Emigre*. We would ship them to the world's media to introduce our new venture, *Emigre* magazine. It's a crazy idea, and the mascot never happens. But the magazine does.

A year later, I carry a heavy box of *Emigre* #1 onto the BART train and head for downtown San Francisco. The guy in the first bookstore insists he only deals with distributors. I say, "I am a distributor. Here are the magazines." He tells me that stores can't deal with every single publisher and that I should approach a distributor. I think he's crazy. The fifth bookstore takes three

copies. I say, "They're \$2.50 each, and I'll accept checks." The guy says, "I'll pay you when I sell them. It's called consignment." I feel nauseous. I don't know whether to believe him or not, but I hand over three copies.

The next day, I browse the newsstand and can't find any copies. My heart pounds. We're an overnight sensation! A reprint will bring down the cost per copy. This is beyond my wildest dreams. I wonder how soon we can get more copies printed. As I'm standing there, beaming with happiness, I notice the newly arrived issue of Andy Warhol's *Interview* magazine. It's also oversized, just like *Emigre*, and has Kathleen Turner on the cover. I reach to pick up a copy and notice that right behind it, looking sad and abandoned, sit my three copies of *Emigre*. I rescue them and place them in front of *Interview*.

2**1985**

I fly to Los Angeles. I take a shuttle bus to Santa Monica to see Marc. He lives in a ramshackle cottage near the ocean, in the shadow of a large structure haunted by junkies and surfers. Dennis Wilson's girlfriend used to live there. We work on *Emigre* #2 for a few hours before we leave for Pollo Loco and then hit Beyond Baroque, the famous poetry venue in Venice.

An aspiring poet, Marc wants to do an *Emigre* poetry event, which he eventually pulls off. Lewis MacAdams is the star of the evening. Zuzana and I design the flyer on our new Macintosh computer. We use Zuzana's new typefaces created on the Mac. We print the thing out on a low-resolution ImageWriter. The quality is crappy, but the letters are beautifully curious. The effect is quite unique. The poets love it.

A week later, Marc phones to tell me that Menno has received an Oscar nomination for the screenplay of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, and he's busy writing the third Indiana Jones movie. Menno's success means that he's out of the picture as far as *Emigre* is concerned. The last thing we get from Menno is his screenplay, *The Death of Christopher Marlowe*. We publish it in *Emigre* #3.

3

1985

Don, the printer at the West Coast Print Center in Berkeley, tells me issue no. 3 is printed and that, to save money, I can do the binding myself. For help, I enlist Zuzana and Megan, who know each other from working on the *Design Book Review*. We spend two nights collating and binding 3,000 copies on a small footpedal-operated saddle stitcher.

Months later, our New York distributor sends a big box. Inside are 200 torn-off covers of *Emigre* #3. What happened? Did people hate the magazine so much they ripped them apart on the spot and these are the remains? Were the magazines kidnapped and they're holding the rest of the issues for ransom? Distressed, I call the distributor in N.Y., and they kindly inform me that it's common practice for distributors to mail back torn-off covers to get credit for unsold magazines. All that saddle stitching. I can barely hold back my tears.

At A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books in San Francisco, I witness, for the first time, someone actually pick up an issue of *Emigre*. The woman scrutinizes the back cover designed around an Iranian theme with the name *Emigre* in Iranian script. She appears to be of Iranian descent. She takes the magazine to the counter, pays for it, and leaves the store. I'm the happiest guy in A Clean Well-Lighted Place for Books. Then I flush with panic. What will she think of the rest of *Emigre*? Is she aware it's not an Iranian periodical? I return to the newsstand and place the remaining copies of *Emigre* in front of *Interview* magazine.

4

1986

Joan Lyons is teaching me how to strip. I'm at the Visual Studies Workshop in Rochester, N.Y. after being awarded a month-long residency to produce an artist book. I had not heard the term "artist book" before, but when I read the application form, I figured it had a lot to do with graphic design, minus a client. That appealed to me, so I applied. To my surprise, I got the residency. The project requires the complete production of a single project—preferably in book form—including design, darkroom work, stripping, plating, and printing.

I spend days in the darkroom. Then a hard snow hits, and I'm stranded in the workshop for the remainder of the month. When not working on my project, I rummage the workshop's immense library of artist books. There are stacks and stacks of books made by artists. It's like I've entered a parallel universe where, instead of text, the image reigns supreme.

I come across the books of Edward Ruscha. They are curious little things. One of them features a handful of photos of swimming pools, many empty pages, and no text except for the title *Nine Swimming Pools*, and a title page that reads "Nine Swimming Pools and a Broken Glass." The final picture in the book is of a broken glass. I can't stop looking at this booklet. What does it mean? The design is done with obvious intent and determination. The images of pools are carefully placed on the pages. The pacing of the pages, some with photographs, many others blank, creates a beautiful rhythm. The type on the cover and title page seems a bit amateurish, yet is powerful in its symmetry. The booklet seems like it's providing a narrative of some kind, forcing me to read something into the images of pools and broken glass. I have no clue what it could be, yet it keeps me engaged. It must be a trick. Ruscha knows that when a reader is confronted with a book, he or she will expect to find meaning. In

the absence of meaning, we make up our own; the art is just a trigger to engage the reader. The artist has his own specific reasons, but he's open to the interpretation of others. This is either a big scam or a smart way to challenge our preconception of what a book can be. For me, the effect is the latter.

Later, Joan shows me Warren Lehrer's book, *French Fries*, which was also produced at the Visual Studies Workshop. *French Fries* documents a series of conversations between patrons and employees in a fast-food restaurant. The book attempts to visualize the text with each character typecast into a distinct color and typographic arrangement. Without a discernible grid, the typography flows freely across the pages, interspersed with images and marks evoking the ambiance and mood of the situation. Except for the work of the famous French designer Robert Massin, I had never seen an approach to typography quite like this before. And unlike the work of Massin, which was in French, I could actually read this. I could experience the relationship between the text and its visualization, and I saw how effective it could be.

Somewhere between seeing the books of Edward Ruscha and Warren Lehrer's *French Fries*, I discovered that my options as a graphic designer had expanded by tenfold.

Meanwhile, Marc has caught the screenplay-writing bug and, like Menno, turns all his attention to Hollywood. *Emigre* magazine is left in my hands. I can do what I want, money permitting.

5

1986

Zuzana has found a new best friend. It's the Macintosh computer. We're supposed to share, but she inhabits it like her life depends on it, which eventually it does. She's found purpose. From her small room on the second floor of our tiny Berkeley apartment, she beams her findings out into the world. Out of her Mac-enabled imagination materializes an avalanche of typeface designs, ideas, discoveries, explorations, and essays about the subject of bitmap fonts.

I can't believe my luck. A private type designer supplies me with new fonts every week and I eagerly use them in *Emigre* magazine. It sure beats typewriter type, which is all I could afford until then. Designers regard the new layouts and low-resolution typefaces with wonder and disgust. But mostly disgust. Yet before too long, as more designers convert to the Macintosh, they start calling us for copies of Zuzana's typefaces, and *Emigre* Fonts, our type foundry, is born.

We secure a tiny room on 4th Street in West Berkeley. It's 400 square feet and within the real-estate offices of Norheim & Yost. Rent is a gamble. I have a part-time job at the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and Zuzana does bitmap-editing work for Adobe Systems. Boxes of unsold *Emigre* issues are stuffed into every nook and cranny of our Berkeley apartment, some functioning as furniture. The place smells like a print shop. The move is imminent.

Years later, when Norheim & Yost move out, we lust for the entire 800 square-foot space. Can we afford it? What the hell. We take the plunge. After only a year, we're working elbow to elbow again, and we consider looking for a bigger space.

1986

There's a message on the machine. It's the Disney Corporation. Can we please call them immediately?

My heart rate doubles. I can't swallow. We're dead.

Emigre #6 just came out with Mickey Mouse's ears on the cover, really big. Mickey seemed like the perfect cross-cultural icon for *Emigre*, even better than Nabokov. Every kid in the world knows Mickey. It never occurred to me to ask for permission. I figured I spent my youth being spoon-fed Disney cartoons, and I have a right to respond to the visual indoctrination. I copied the ears, enlarged them to fill out *Emigre*'s oversized format, and slapped them on the cover.

Right after the magazine comes out, a fellow designer informs me Disney sues people who misuse their trademarked characters. All week I can't sleep; I stare at the ceiling inventing excuses. What a horrible way to end my American Dream, I think. I'm getting sued by Mickey Mouse.

I finally gather enough courage to call Disney back, and find out they're interested in buying some of our typefaces, and can I send them a catalog?

I'm so relieved I toss in a free *Emigre* T-shirt.

7

1987

At Alonzo Printing in South San Francisco, the secretary announces my arrival over the PA.

“Rudy from *Emigre* is here.”

The announcement startles some of the employees, many of whom are Mexican. The California Border Patrol goes by the Spanish name of La Migra, which sounds like the Spanish pronunciation of *Emigre*.

The people at Alonzo want to know why we call our magazine *Emigre*. I tell them it’s a long story, but that I’m a Dutch green-card holder and my wife’s an immigrant from Slovakia and that most of the people we feature in the magazine are from other countries. They ask if we show any Mexican artists. I’m embarrassed to tell them we haven’t. But I remind them they’re the ones printing the magazine, and that’s an art in itself. They appreciate that.

8

1987

Zuzana and I are invited to lecture for Kathy McCoy and her class of Cranbrook graduate students who are on a California field trip. Issues of *Emigre* made their way to Cranbrook students, and we recently saw Kathy lecture at CCAC in Oakland. We're aware of each other's work, and there's a mutual attraction. We've never lectured before, and we're not sure what to say about our work, but Zuzana steals the show by showing her research involving low-resolution type designs. The students are impressed.

9

1988

I spend a fortune on two intercontinental phone calls. I quickly came to realize that one of the benefits of running your own magazine is that you can call people you admire and ask them all kinds of probing questions. For *Emigre* #9, I fill three 90-minute cassette tapes interviewing Ivo Watts-Russell and Vaughan Oliver, the two men behind 4AD records in London. 4AD is one of the many small independent record labels popping up all over England and the U.S. The Do It Yourself movement is in full swing and I'm curious to know how 4AD manages to make it all work. I have a million questions and I can use some pointers.

After each interview, I duplicate the cassettes. I'm afraid my tape recorder will mangle one. I spend a week transcribing the tapes. It's a tedious process, not least because I'm a two-finger typist. I spend another few days editing the interviews down to a manageable length. I enjoy the experience. The cutting and pasting of the editing process is not unlike design. I think I'm pretty good at this stuff. Best of all, I'm getting free advice on how to run a small business.

10**1988**

A wall divides our office. On one side, I'm packing magazine orders. On the other, Zuzana speaks on the phone with someone who wants the words "Beach Culture" set in a selection of her typefaces. Hanging up, Zuzana tells me this guy also welcomed any of our ideas for a logo. I ask who it was. She tells me the guy's name was Carson or something.

The market for selling fonts on floppies is still very small. Most designers remain skeptical about using computers. Instead, they call us to set type for them. Zuzana goes through the complicated steps of setting type on her Mac, printing it out on the laser printer, real big, and then reducing it to size on a photostat camera. Then we mail the art out by FedEx, or people come pick it up at our office.

11**1989**

It's June and I'm sitting in the 24th row to the right of first base. The Oakland A's are playing the Boston Red Sox at the Coliseum, and we're in the bottom of the seventh inning. Zuzana's bored. The weather is beautiful, but she wouldn't have come if she'd known baseball games dragged on for so long. The tickets are compliments of Lompa Printing. Last week they screwed up printing *Emigre* #11. Instead of running all the signatures in dark blue, they ran them in black. I gaped in disbelief at six huge stacks of paper, the result of a long night of printing. They offered to reprint, but wasting all that paper and labor didn't seem right. I had to think about it. Later that day I asked them to add another color run to all the sheets. They agreed. I designed a series of large graphics for each page that printed in transparent yellow over the black text. It was our first issue with multiple colors inside. The next day they gave me two tickets to an A's game.

12

1989

Jonathan Barnbrook visits our Berkeley office. He wears a white puffy shirt and a black satin ribbon ties back his ponytail. He resembles a musketeer, but instead of swash-buckling he quietly sits down behind the Mac and shows us a collection of his latest digital typeface designs. He's one of many guests from all corners of the world who have made the trek to our 4th Street design office. They're either early converts to the Macintosh, eager to share experiences, or curiosity seekers itching to know what the buzz is about. We enjoy a steady stream of visitors: April Greiman, Wolfgang Weingart, Rick Vermeulen, Matthew Carter, John Downer, Dan Friedman, Erik and Joan Spiekermann, David Kelly from Ideo, Philippe Apeloig, Shawn Wolfe, Ferdinand Boudin, Gerard and Marian Unger, Erik van Blokland and Just van Rossum. A contingent of Japanese designers arrives in a stretch limousine, accompanied by a translator. They barely fit into our office. We show them our work, but the translator is baffled by the terminology of computer-generated design. The Japanese designers smile and nod politely.

We host design classes on field trips to the Bay Area. The Cal Arts graduate class visits with faculty members Ed Fella, Jeffery Keedy, Lorraine Wild, and Laurie Haycock. One student stands out: tall, barefoot Barry Deck. After we do our show-and-tell, Jeffery Keedy gives us a peek at the early drawings of a typeface he has named Keedy Sans. We offer to release his font commercially. He frowns and asks, "Who would want a font like this?" We tell him we don't concern ourselves too much with that, since people rarely buy fonts for reasons you hope they do. I tell him we like the concept and the intent behind the font, and that's what matters most. After twisting his arm for nearly a year, he finally signs the contract.

13**1989**

A letter from the National Endowment for the Arts arrives in the mail. It's become increasingly difficult to fund *Emigre* ourselves, so I applied for grant money. I notice the NEA's logo on the envelope. It's very modern and corporate looking, like it was actually designed by a professional graphic designer. For some reason this raises my hopes. I rip open the envelope and start reading: "Dear sir, we're sorry to inform you, blah, blah, blah." Again, I'm turned down. The previous year I had approached the Dutch government for funding, but they too "decline(d) the opportunity to subsidize." Can you imagine being turned down by the Dutch government? It seems that just about anybody gets grant money or stipends or subsidies from the Dutch government. That really hurt.

Defeated, I put the NEA letter back in its envelope and file it in my growing archive of rejection letters. I promise never to apply for grant money again. The dismissals are simply too hard to take, bad for my self-esteem. Our official line is to say we want to be completely independent. No begging. No handouts. Let market forces decide.

As we continue our publishing adventure, people occasionally ask us if we have some kind of trust fund supporting us. A trust fund!? That would have been nice, too.

14

1990

We're crowding around a small table in a classroom at the Kunstgewerbe Schule in Basel, Switzerland. It's me, a bunch of design students from around the world, and Wolfgang Weingart. We're discussing what Weingart calls the chaotic state of design today, and I believe he indicts me and my magazine as conspirators. He advances upon a huge shelving unit, bursting with design books, and without hesitation whips out a poster. It's Allen Hori's poster for a lecture by Kathy McCoy at Cranbrook. Weingart is as serious as a nun twisting the ear of a naughty boy. "This," he says, "is the absolute worst I've ever seen!" If a first shot started the so-called legibility wars, it was Allen Hori's poster.

In my estimation, one can trace much of the experimental typographic expressionism during the early 90s to the work designed at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, where Allen Hori's work was my personal favorite. Hori mixed the precision of Swiss design with the spatial freedom of, for instance, Hard Werken, the famous Dutch design studio where he later worked as an intern. Hori was the bridge. He tied all these experiments together. He abandoned traditional typographic hierarchy and demanded from the reader a fair amount of involvement in order to decipher the message. Hori was also not shy to include personal messages in his work, both visual and verbal. These functioned on a secondary level and were not meant to be immediately obvious to the reader. Their mystery drew the reader in.

Hori's work defied what most of us had learned in school about typography. Typography was meant to aid the reader, not put the reader to work. But his posters were never a prescription for anything. They were posters that answered their brief fairly well. If a theory ever accompanied the work, it was to justify his particular design: it was descriptive, not prescriptive.

The fact that these mannerisms were widely copied proved that designers recognized the formal beauty of the work and were hungry to expand their typographic palettes.

Weingart cannot see it that way. One of the great typographic experimenters of the 70s, he can't stop talking about how bad Allen Hori's poster is. I guess everyone involved in the shaping of a major innovation automatically believes it represents the end of the road, the pinnacle, and Weingart was no exception. It must be difficult to accept that anyone can take it a step further or push it in a different direction. Later that evening, at a local Basel restaurant where he treats the students and me to a dinner of venison stew and beer, he continues to rant. He just can't stop himself.

15

1990

The Herb Lubalin Study Center of Design and Typography in New York produces wonderful exhibition catalogs, concisely written and beautifully designed by Ellen Lupton and Abbott Miller. I rarely see designers take credit for both design and content. On my next trip to New York, I call them and ask for an interview. Their apartment is around the corner from Cooper Union where they both went to school and where the Lubalin Center is located. They have a tiny office and a big dog, and they invite me for dinner. Have I seen *The Telephone Book* by Avital Ronnel and Richard Eckersley? I haven't. They suggest I check it out and then explain why, and very soon my head is spinning. I'm inspired by their passion for design and bowled over by their knowledge of design history.

Later, they submit the essay "Type Writing" to *Emigre* to run alongside their interview. It's the first time the names Saussure, Derrida, and Barthes appear in *Emigre* magazine. I'm uneasy publishing the essay because I have no background in semiotics, poststructuralist theory, or any of that stuff. But I'm fascinated by Ellen and Abbott's method of classifying type. I knew you could classify type into two simple camps: broad nibbed pen-based, or pointed pen-based. But that system only works for fonts based on calligraphy. By borrowing ideas from structuralism, poststructuralism, and postmodernism, Ellen and Abbott devised a more intricate taxonomy. I read their article over and over again, and in the process I got my first glimpse of ideas based on French linguistic theory.

16

1990

I'm sitting across the table from Piet Schreuders in his home studio in Amsterdam, and I'm struck by how quiet and shy he seems. This is the man who published a small book in 1977 entitled *Lay In, Lay Out*, in which he accused the graphic design profession of being a criminal enterprise, and that it should really not be allowed to exist. According to Schreuders, designers are vain and self-important charlatans, while their theories are no more than bubbles to be popped. Despite (or because of) Piet's position as an outsider, a self-taught designer no less, the statement infuriated professional graphic designers. Their heated reactions revealed more about graphic designers and their motivations than anything they might have said in the absence of such provocation. I wonder if I could bring such outrageous statements to the table when interviewing designers for *Emigre*.

Piet shows me copies of his self-published magazine *Furore*, which he calls his "archive." He is an avid collector of all sorts of esoterica. The shelves and drawers in his office overflow with materials of all kinds, from Beatles bubblegum cards to pulp-fiction paperbacks. He tells me that one way of bringing order to this mess is by turning it into a magazine. When an issue is published, that's his archive, and he throws out most of the material that was included.

I ask him if he was surprised by the attention *Furore* received from graphic designers. He says he never wanted to be known for his design work; he's a journalist. It is the content that matters most to him and the design simply evolved according to his needs. But designers only noticed the surface of *Furore* and used what they liked.

17

1991

Zuzana and I peek through the shop window of Henk Elenga's design studio on Melrose Avenue in Los Angeles.

Henk had moved to California from Holland, and I was eager to meet him. We're not sure we have the right address. Inside, it looks like a cross between the set of Sanford & Son and a metal workshop. The only sign that this may be Henk's design office is a small Macintosh computer looking lost and out of place. We were supposed to meet Henk at nine this morning, but he's nowhere to be seen. Half an hour later, oblivious of our appointment, he appears. It doesn't matter. Henk is one of my design heroes. He's worth the wait.

In the late 70s, Hard Werken, the Dutch design studio Henk cofounded, made big waves. Their esthetic was robust and bold and distinctly blue-collar. It was the opposite of the *Nieuwe Zakelijkheid* (the new sobriety) that flourished in Dutch design during the late 70s. Hard Werken claimed that what mattered was the "total image," not the purity of a typeface or allegiance to the norms of polite design. Their motto was simple: "a lot can be used." Their magazine, named after their studio Hard Werken, proved it.

During our visit, I mention to Henk that I'd never owned an issue and asked if he had extras. He shuffled to a closet, rummaged around, and, from within a mountain of clutter, excavated a copy of *Hard Werken*. What had been crafted with blood, sweat, and tears was now tattered, creased, and torn. This was the magazine that launched their careers, influenced hundreds of young designers like myself, and was highly collectible. Henk hardly cared. Instead, he was eager to talk about welding, to show off his new lamps and furniture, and to relate how he had to turn L.A. upside down and shake it before he found the wily electrical part that had eluded him for so long. I wanted to con-

fess that I had styled *Emigre* after *Hard Werken* magazine. But I think he already knew it.

I've often wondered what attracted me to designers like Henk. They had no agenda to clean up the world, to streamline communication, to create crystal goblets, to attain perfect clarity. Yet the work they produced functioned beautifully in the world. It looked as if it were pulled up from within, as opposed to applied from without. It seemed alive and vibrant and fit perfectly within Dutch society. Could it be possible that through their own humanity, through their use of everyday materials, and through the pride and pleasure they took in their craft, their work made a connection with their audience in spite of its individualism and expressiveness? Could it be that their work attained a kind of universal appeal simply because it was so vibrant, so human? Was Piet Schreuders right about designers and their charlatan theories?

18**1991**

The famous New York designer Massimo Vignelli publishes a poster claiming that the “current proliferation of typefaces represents a new level of visual pollution and that all we need are a few basic ones.” I write him for permission to show the poster on the cover of *Emigre* #18. The issue features type experimenters such as Just van Rossum and Erik van Blokland, who have just completed their first working version of random font technology, a system intended to render type with an infinite variety of imperfections.

Vignelli replies that posters reside in the public domain by virtue of their nature, and he grants, unnecessarily, permission to use it. He kindly informs me that the Italian word for poster is “manifesto,” and that this one declares war against the visual pollution caused by trashy typefaces. I’m guessing he means us. He’s in a great fighting mood, he says, and can’t wait to see *Emigre* #18. I’m sure he’ll be displeased.

19

1991

On the drive to Cranbrook, we pass the sprawling mansions of Bloomfield Hills. The person who picked me up at the airport seems to know I'm a basketball fan and identifies the home of Isaiah Thomas, star point guard of the Detroit Pistons and one of the original "Bad Boys" of basketball. I'm nervous about meeting Kathy McCoy and the students. I'm there for three days to do a workshop and lecture, and do some interviews for *Emigre* #19. I'm nervous because, like Ellen and Abbot, the faculty and students at Cranbrook are into French literary theory. Because I published Ellen and Abbott's writing on the topic, I'm afraid they're expecting me to say something clever about this cryptic French stuff. I'm more comfortable talking about the Bad Boys of basketball than the bad boys of deconstructionism.

Despite my deficiency, I understand the work at Cranbrook. I'm attracted to it and note the similarities to my own work. Their inspiration came from another source, but their goal seems the same. Cranbrook designers were searching for alternatives to the lifeless and reductivist forms that had numbed typography by the late 1970s. We agreed that the one-size-fits-all design approach, which does not address the specifics and context of each particular job, makes for dull and ineffective designs.

We wanted to explore a more expressive, individualized visual vocabulary directed towards smaller, like-minded audiences. We wanted to move away from imposing a universal language on a faceless demographic. We were searching for visually intelligent readers who would find pleasure in reading visually rich designs. This meant forfeiting the traditional commercial jobs in corporate America and seeking out more cultural and, by definition, less lucrative jobs. Or better yet, make our own

products and become our own clients. During my interview with Kathy, I know we're on the same wavelength when she proclaims, "We are not here at Cranbrook to prepare indentured servants for corporate America."

My lecture that night comes off stiff and rehearsed. So much for being an inspired bad boy—literary, athletic, or otherwise. At the end, when I invite questions, the only sound from the audience comes from Laurie and Scott Makela's baby. The night ends not with a bang, but with funny gurgling.

20

1991

I'm walking down Park Avenue with fellow Dutchman Christiaan Kuypers, who works at *Spy* magazine, when this hipster barks, "Hey, Rudy, great lecture!" I ask Christiaan the chances of running into someone in this huge city who saw my lecture the night before. I feel like a star! Christiaan tells me to calm down. This is home to the largest concentration of graphic designers in the tri-state area.

The previous night I had presented a lecture for the Society of Publication Designers. I had two slide carousels, but they only had one small screen. Half my slides projected partially onto a white paneled door, creating an interesting fractured look. The effect was disturbingly unprofessional, although to some in the audience it may have seemed intentional. After the lecture, a large group of us went to dinner. Two chairs to my left, a guy slouched in casual clothes. At the end of the evening, he walked up to me and said, "Hi, I'm David Carson." The name sounded familiar, but I couldn't place it. We chatted until the party broke up and they brought me back to the Gramercy Park Hotel.

My next lecture is at the Walker Art center. It's the third lecture that week, and for once before going on stage, I'm relaxed. Or maybe I'm tired. They tell me it's the biggest crowd for an AIGA lecture at the Walker, ever. I even beat famous Minneapolis designer Joe Duffy. It goes off without a hitch. Afterwards, they take me out for dinner in Minneapolis, and I enjoy the event unreservedly. It's the first time I don't mind doing a lecture. But the next lecture, I'm super nervous again. What gives? After about 20 of these things, I call it quits. No more lectures. People can't understand why I shy away from the spotlight. As an excuse, I tell them it doesn't pay enough, which is not a lie.

21

1992

I manage to trade a number of *Emigre* collector's issues for a first-edition copy of Robert Venturi's book *Learning from Las Vegas*. This I can relate to. His idea was to blend design into the environment by incorporating common, everyday forms, as opposed to applying a rigid and dogmatic language. This was exactly the approach I had recognized and admired in the work of Hard Werken, Piet Schreuders, and Cranbrook. I can see why the McCoy's dug it and why it became such an important book at Cranbrook.

It spurs me to finally read Barthes and Derrida and some of the others. After several tries, I realize I'm ill prepared for the philosophical complexity. I cannot bear to read through them. It doesn't matter. Many of the theories had filtered through to our own thinking. Zuzana's notion, that people read best what they read most, is a poststructuralist critique, or so we're told. She'd recognized that legibility is not a natural phenomenon but a fairly arbitrary construct, contingent on cultural values and therefore open to change. In Frances Butler's design class at U.C. Berkeley, she read Barthes's *Mythologies*, but it confused her more than anything, and she failed to see how it related to graphic design.

The air in those days was thick with ideas that originated in linguistic theory. We were there and we inhaled. Some of it must have made sense and stuck. We also knew there were other routes one could travel to find inspiration and keep graphic design moving forward. Our favorite trip was to keep asking the simple question, "Why?" The answers filled page after page in *Emigre*.

Meanwhile, Scott Makela tells me that at Cranbrook they're now reading Charles Bukowski. I like Bukowski. His writing offers

little to graphic design (unless you want to try drinking three bottles of wine while laying out a brochure). What I enjoy are his insights on the creative process and the stories of his struggles as an artist. I pinned a Bukowski quote on the wall behind my computer. It reads: "Some people like what you do, some people hate what you do, but most people simply don't give a damn." The sentiment consoles me. Linguistic theory rarely does.

22**1992**

I run into David Carson at the How conference in San Diego. We're both on the list of speakers. I agreed a year ago to do this lecture. Like a person trying to quit smoking, I promise it's my last one. After his lecture, Carson wants to tell me something. When he showed the cover of *Beach Culture* #3, the one that says "No Emigre Fonts" on the cover, some nit-picking loudmouth in the audience cried, "But what about the logo? Isn't that Senator, an Emigre font?" I muster a laugh and say, "Boy, isn't that funny?" I couldn't admit the loudmouth was me.

23**1992**

My friend, the designer Chuck Byrne, calls and asks if I've read the new issue of *Print* magazine. I say no. Why? "Check it out," he says. "You'll love it." Next day I'm at Cody's Bookstore in Berkeley, and there it is. Inside, Phillip Meggs interviews Massimo Vignelli and Ed Benguiat, two New York design institutions. They agree *Emigre* magazine is garbage and then deploy considerable brainpower toward detailing what subspecies of garbage it is. Benguiat declines to appraise it too deeply; as if it were a bad smell or breed of cat; it's simply a thing he doesn't want in his house. But Vignelli has made up his mind and minces no words: *Emigre* is a national calamity. An aberration of culture. Yikes! Vignelli wasn't kidding when he said he was in a fighting mood. I can't figure it out. Two design gods devote part of their interview to trashing *Emigre* instead of showcasing their own work. I break out in a cold sweat. I am garbage. What does this mean?

24**1992**

For months, we've been applying for second-class mailing privileges with the United States Postal Service. We'd save a ton of money mailing subscriptions at cheaper rates.

But the USPS isn't convinced we're a real magazine. They have rules and regulations that define what is and what is not a magazine. They want to make sure we're not a product catalog, which would disqualify us. We clear that hurdle but face another: our logo. It changes and disobeys. It won't mind its place at the top of the cover, where it's supposed to be. I explain that we're not concerned with newsstand sales, and so there's no need to have the logo on top or look the same each time. Suspicious, the USPS observes that it's an awfully strange creation to be called a magazine. I'm flattered by the compliment.

25**1993**

Like *Emigre*, Carson starts his own type foundry called Garage Fonts, and he runs an ad in *Ray Gun* that parodies our font catalogs. It drives me nuts. I call Jarrett, the publisher of *Ray Gun*, and ask him to stop Carson from doing this crap. I argue that it's unfair business practice and plagiarism, and I threaten legal action. A week later, during my interview with him, Rick Valicenti mentions he saw the ad and thought it was pretty funny. I feel like a prick. I need to lighten up.

26

1993

I'm often struck by how little the interviews I read in most design magazines resemble the discussions I have with my own designer friends. They are usually too short and barely scratch the surface. There's no passion, no deep involvement with the subject, and they show a general lack of awareness of the revolution taking place all around us. After I'm done reading, I'm always left wanting more.

Occasionally, I'm interviewed myself and notice that most interviewers ask the same general questions. When did you start? How long does it take to design an issue of *Emigre*? What's the next big thing? When the interviews get printed, I barely recognize my own words because they've been severely edited. The experience inspires me to conduct my interviews for *Emigre* differently. First, I will only interview designers whose work I know intimately. Second, I give everyone the opportunity to read their interview before we print it. I want the interviewees to express their ideas properly. Space is no issue. I have some large pages to fill.

To help the process along, I develop an interview style that's a cross between the devil's advocate and the straight man in a comedy duo. I serve up a mixture of questions that allows the subjects to talk to their strengths and then stumps them. I usually have 15 to 20 detailed questions written out, then improvise the rest. Some interviews are conducted by phone. Sometimes I visit the interviewee. All interviews are tape-recorded.

When I'm on the road, I'm like a traveling editorial office. I conduct the interview, run the tape recorder, shoot the photos, and collect the samples of work. I have no qualifications to do any of this, but it doesn't seem to bother the subjects. I mention I'm from *Emigre*, and they greet me with open arms.

27**1993**

David Carson steadily becomes a graphic design star. He is featured in magazine articles and at design conferences; he conducts numerous workshops; he wins uncountable design awards. *Ray Gun*, the new magazine he art-directs, is a virtual playground of experimental graphic design and type-faces, as well as an outlet for his font foundry. Comparisons to *Emigre* are frequently made.

Carson is often interviewed, but there are many questions left unasked. I set up an interview with him for *Emigre* #24, but he cancels at the last minute. We've just printed 20,000 flyers announcing the interview. Out of frustration, I publish my questions under the title, "11 Questions I Always Wanted to Ask David Carson," and I tell people he stood me up. Carson is pissed off, saying it's a mean-spirited gesture.

Half a year later, I invite him again for an interview and he reluctantly agrees. He's suspicious of my motivations. I've been critical of his work and claim it's clearly influenced by the work done at Cranbrook and CalArts. He thinks otherwise and I'm curious to discuss this with him. He's concerned I'm setting him up to make him look bad. I tell him that like everyone I interview, he'll get a chance to edit.

The interview takes place by telephone; I'm in Sacramento, Carson is in Kansas City. Despite my devil's advocate/straight man routine, neither of us enjoys the experience. We constantly bicker over our past encounters. Sometimes you can get too deeply involved in your subjects. Still, I end up with two hours of cassette tape, which takes me two days to transcribe. I FedEx the text to Carson, who's now staying at a hotel in New York City. It comes back heavily edited. In a gesture of neutrality, I set the entire interview in Times New Roman and Helvetica.

Not surprisingly, due to David's fame, the issue becomes a big

seller. Stores are reordering copies regularly, and back issues outsell any other issue we've published to date. Much of David's work exhibits the same kind of typographic unorthodoxy we've been championing for the past years. But people seem to like it better when it's not cloaked in theory.

28

1993

Eye magazine publishes the article, “Cult of the Ugly,” by Steven Heller. It criticizes the kind of designs we often publish in *Emigre*. This time it’s not just the work itself that’s problematic, but the effect this work may have on mainstream design. Heller claims that by making it public, by putting it in front of an audience, the work will be copied and misused, despite the fact that it’s “ugly.” This is a curious dilemma. How does one keep from influencing others? Much of the work shown in the article was never meant for mainstream use. It was not a recipe for others to copy. On the contrary, the work tried to set itself apart by purposely being different, and it was often addressed to small, specific audiences.

The essay creates a firestorm of debate. *Eye* receives more letters in response to this essay than any essay before, and the discussion spills over to a number of other design publications. I’m starting to realize that by publishing the article, Heller is perpetuating the very thing he is so concerned about. By showing the work in *Eye*, in such a contested manner, he is simply making it more public and ever more popular. Was it Clement Greenberg who said, “All profoundly original work is considered ugly at first”? Perhaps we’re on to something. It leaves me unsure whether to lash out at Heller or to thank him.

29

1994

Tim, our office manager, has set up our digital font distribution system. We call it “Now Serving,” and it is set up using a bulletin board, or BBS, running under the First Class software. It enables people to order and download our fonts online. As far as we know, we’re the first type foundry to make this work.

A few months later, as the bulletin board catches on with people, Tim suggests that we also have a discussion board. I ask him what that means. “Well,” he says, “people can post messages about any topic and respond to each other. For instance, they can discuss issues addressed in *Emigre* magazine and extend the discourse and it will be live.” Who will edit it, I wonder? Tim suggests it can be self-edited, or I can personally view all messages before they are posted and edit as needed. It seems like an awful lot of work. I already have my hands full. And I’m not sure if I can stand a double-dose of people telling me the magazine sucks. Plus, I really like the physicality of the letters we receive. I would miss that aspect. Tim thinks we’d be missing a real opportunity. He thinks these kinds of discussion forums are the future of publishing. “Plus,” he says in a last effort to persuade me, “imagine how this will draw people to our bulletin board.” I’m not convinced, and we move on to the next item on our list of issues to discuss.

30

1994

Steven Heller's article "Cult of the Ugly" has long legs. It seems to have hit a nerve with graphic designers. We add to the excitement by dedicating an entire issue to interviewing some of the players involved, including Heller. This generates another storm of replies. In the essay, "Ugliness is in the Eye of the Beholder," Rick Poynor, *Eye's* editor, tries to get to the bottom of the issue by asking: "What are the cultural catalysts for the current wave of 'Ugly' design and what is its meaning?" It's a loaded question, since it assumes we all agree that the work is ugly and that it has a single meaning, as if it were made according to a grand overarching scheme, which it wasn't.

"Form makes a claim," declares Gunnar Swanson in a letter to *Emigre*. He too seems eager to know what these new forms mean. True, form does make a claim, but it rarely does so in a vacuum. Form is tied to context, or at least it should be. Somewhere along the way, however, graphic design had become separated from context. The one-size-fits-all solution of the popular Swiss International Style ignored context almost entirely. Massimo Vignelli's notion that all design problems can be solved with only a few basic typefaces was one example of this attitude. If there were a cultural catalyst for the new work, the need to question and challenge this kind of dogma was surely part of it.

31

1994

At LAX, a long black limousine is waiting for us. Zuzana and I feel like big shots. On our way to the Design Center in West Hollywood, our talkative driver reveals that he's an aspiring actor. And what do we do? We're designers here to receive a Chrysler Award. Are we car designers, he asks? No, we're graphic designers who specialize in typeface design and publish a design magazine. He's quiet, mulling it over. We explain what typeface design is, but he steers the conversation back to acting. He drops us off, and we enter the Design Center courtyard where we're greeted by Chee Pearlman, the editor of *I.D.* magazine and organizer of the event. We're introduced to other winners, one of whom has invented a system for treating contaminated bodies of water using natural organisms. Wow! I check out the program notes again to read the judges' description of our work. It says that our work "makes people aware of the very artificiality and strangeness of our world as it appears in the written word." I look at the reproduction of one of our posters. It looks so tiny and insignificant: just colored inks on paper, so ephemeral. I know the judges are very serious about this, and perhaps making people aware of the strangeness of our printed world is not exactly without merit. I'm sure Roland Barthes would approve. I wish I could have told our limousine driver that *we* had invented a system for treating contaminated bodies of water. I'm sure it would have held his attention. I know it held mine.

32**1994**

In my introduction to *Emigre* #30, I write that Sumner Stone's new typeface for *Print* magazine is a beauty but describe their redesign of the magazine as a dung heap. After having been labeled everything from garbage to ugly by the New York design cognoscenti, I was curious to see what would happen if I turned the tables. Within weeks, the publisher of *Print* writes me to say my description was "a thoroughly gratuitous and unprofessional piece of nastiness." I know exactly how he feels, and I'm relieved to know I'm not the only one with a thin skin.

33

1995

After publishing 32 issues, we shrink the magazine's size from its trademark tabloid dimension to a more traditional 8.5 by 11 inches. It's simply become too expensive and work-intensive to mail out the oversized magazines in their custom-made boxes.

The decision to go smaller coincides with my growing interest in publishing design theory and criticism informed by the same motivation that had generated the new design work. In other words, a kind of writing that questioned and challenged much of what we had learned about graphic design. This was not an effort to defend the new work or to create a new set of rules, but rather to look at the larger cultural and social context of the new work, the computer technology that propelled it, and its relationship to the other arts. At Cranbrook and CalArts, graduate students and faculty like Anne Burdick, Andrew Blauvelt, Jeffery Keedy, and Lorraine Wild had already started writing about these issues as part of their thesis requirements, or as extensions of their teaching and practice. But few people were aware of their efforts. The mainstream design magazines had little interest since the essays were either too esoteric, too long, or both. I see an opportunity and make *Emigre* available. I can only offer to pay them a minuscule honorarium of roughly \$200-\$500 per essay. It doesn't matter. For now, they just want to tell their stories.

We print 7,000 copies. It costs \$12,500 to print and \$2,400 to mail out copies to 2,500 subscribers. We distribute about 3,000 copies to stores around the world. The rest we sell as back issues. Without our increasing typeface sales, we could not afford the endeavor.

The change of format and lengthy academic essays receive mixed replies. Most readers complain the writing doesn't relate

directly to the practical concerns of graphic designers. Another complaint, by Pat Watson, becomes a refrain in the *Emigre* letters section: stop quoting the French intellectuals!

34

1995

The British design critic Robin Kinross publishes a tract entitled *Fellow Readers*. It's a full-frontal attack on the kind of work and ideas about graphic design that we regularly publish in *Emigre*. One of his criticisms centers on our quest for individualism and self-expression. He claims that this work relies so much on the taste of the maker that one can no longer discuss it. In the process—and this is Kinross's biggest contention—we're forfeiting commitment to a common referent, a shared ground for discussion. First we're garbage, then chaotic and ugly, and now it's our individualism and self-expression that's causing distress.

Criticism from the older *garde* and traditionalists alike was to be expected. The new work thumbed its nose at many of the established rules of typography with mixed results. I'm not exactly sure who's right or wrong. Great arguments are made on both sides. But many missed the point. In my estimation, graphic design had simply become too narrowly defined as a service-oriented profession that organizes and gives form to the ideas of commercial clients. I saw opportunities for graphic designers not just as facilitators, but as the producers of messages, ideas, and products. Not just hired hands, but initiators with a personal stake in the projects they created: Henk Elenga's furniture, Hard Werken's magazine, the books and magazines by Piet Schreuders, Warren Lehrer's artist books, the political posters of Grapus, Bruce Lichers's record label, Jeffery Keedy's typefaces. Individualism and self-expression were exactly the qualities that made these projects so appealing to others.

35

The number of letters to the editor grows with each issue.

1995

We're getting upwards of 20 letters per issue. They range

from lengthy, thoughtful essays to short notes that say nothing more than, "Fuck you, *Emigre*!" We publish them all without much editing. Readers cite the Letters to the Editor as their favorite part of the magazine. To fit all the letters in, I often have to set them in tiny six-point type, a decision which itself generates a number of replies.

36

1995

It's 3:00 in the afternoon and 101 degrees. The air conditioners hum at a steady pace. There's little relief in sight.

This is Sacramento, and it's going to be hot like this from June through September.

Our office occupies the building that used to house Didion Hardware, run by author Joan Didion's uncle. The transition of the building's occupants from hardware to software merchants is California history in a nutshell. I wonder what Joan Didion would make of it. But I'm getting off track.

How did we get here? In 1989, our Berkeley office shook like a shivering dog. The Loma Prieta earthquake hit with a force of 6.9 on the Richter scale. The metal shelving units in our small storage room twisted like they were made of wire hangers and deposited hundreds of issues of *Emigre* magazine all over the floor. Part of the Oakland Bay Bridge collapsed, as did the Nimitz freeway. A large section of the upscale San Francisco Marina district burned. The electricity went out and our computers shut down, and I realized I'd forgotten to save most of the work I'd done in the past hour. After the shaking stops, it got eerily quiet. The only sound was a few car alarms going off in the neighborhood. We came out of the event unharmed, but the event rattled our nerves.

A year later, still in Berkeley on 4th Street, I'm being interviewed by Michael Dooley for *Print* magazine. It's warm outside and the doors are open. The electronic eye that sets off a bell when you enter our office keeps ringing but no one's entering. We step outside to see what's causing the ruckus and notice a hot easterly wind is blowing wild, while the sky is black with smoke. Ash is flying through the air like in a ticker-tape parade. That day, the Oakland/Berkeley hills fire destroys over 2,000 homes.

We've had enough and decide to move. But where? We'd hate to leave California. We order a huge map from the California Geological Survey that shows every earthquake ever recorded in red dots. The bigger the dot, the bigger the quake. The whole map is red except a small area smack in middle of the state. Sacramento, here we come!

We buy a two-bedroom house on a tree-lined street and rent an office/warehouse about a mile away so we can bike to work. It feels good. It feels safe. As we fill out the paperwork to buy the house, we're told that flood insurance is mandatory. Much of Sacramento lies below river level. The chance of a major flood is imminent. Right then we learn to stop worrying too much about our physical whereabouts and shift our concerns to more practical considerations, such as the latest UPS pick-up time.

37

1996

Our self-initiated, self-published work is often viewed with suspicion by fellow graphic designers. Design for design's sake, they call it, which is not meant as a compliment. The common perception within design is that creating your own products is easy. Take the client out of the equation, and life's a walk in the park. Be your own client and it can hardly be called design anymore, since you're not solving any real problems. This has always puzzled me. If it's so easy, why don't all designers forget about clients? They often seem to despise their clients, so why do they torture themselves?

Perhaps designers know better. Having no clients has its advantages, but it also means that now you are the one who has to create content and pay all the printing bills. You're also responsible for organizing the manufacture, marketing, and distribution of your products, and, finally, for getting paid. And if people dislike what you do, you'll be the first to know. With your name, address, and phone number on every single catalog you send out, there's no hiding from your customers. It ain't a walk in the park. But I highly recommend it.

TALLY

Staff:

- three full-time sales people
- two freelance programmers to keep our e-commerce web site running
- a freelance copy editor
- a freelance bookkeeper and accountant
- a law firm on retainer
- a financial adviser
- a weekly cleaning crew

Stuff to deal with not related to design:

- contracts
- lawsuits (to protect our Intellectual Property.)
- accounting
- inventory
- medical insurance
- business property insurance
- dental plans
- pensions
- business license
- rent
- bonuses
- new computers for everyone, every other year

Two questions we'll never be able to answer:

1. How did we ever get into this? (Neither Zuzana nor I has a background in running a business.)
2. Why has no one ever approached us with a buyout offer? (We can't wait to tell them we're not for sale.)

39

1996

A shipment of 120 boxes of the new issue of *Emigre* arrives at the office. The boxes come loaded onto shipping pallets, and thin metal bands secure the boxes to prevent toppling. Ella, one of our sales people, advances upon the metal bands with a big pair of metal cutters. With one snip, she releases the tension in the band. It slices through the air with a high-pitched zing and, like a whip, slashes Ella's leg.

It's not the first accident to happen on a delivery day. A truck driver delivering our catalogs once jumped off the lift gate and broke an ankle. Ella's a good sport, though, probably realizing we weren't kidding when we advertised her job as light typing and heavy lifting. While the blood dries on Ella's leg, we finish unloading the truck.

It then takes two weeks to ship out about 2,000 copies to roughly 100 bookstores around the world. It takes up to six months and several hundred phone calls to collect the money.

40**1996**

Because *Emigre* magazine now emphasizes design writing, some readers elect to regard me as a design theory specialist. They stump me with their questions. If they only knew I can barely follow some of the rhetoric myself and that I often feel outpaced by the people whose work I publish. But a whole new world of ideas is opening for me, and I'm getting a free education in design discourse. Well, almost free.

Many others are more qualified than I am to publish a magazine like *Emigre*, but for whatever reason, they're not doing it. So I take on the role of editor by default and learn to fly by the seat of my pants. As a student of design, I can't imagine a better gig.

41

1997

I write a letter to Massimo Vignelli. I invite him to design the promotional poster for Zuzana Licko's new typeface, *Filosofia*, which is an interpretation of Bodoni, one of Vignelli's five sacred typefaces. I don't expect him to respond, but I simply can't resist the temptation. I can't imagine a better designer to test-drive a Bodoni-inspired typeface. It would be such a surprise for people if he agreed to do this.

But he does respond! His letter arrives in an off-white envelope with the return address of "Vignelli Associates *Designers*" printed on the back in what looks like red thermal printing. Red thermal printing! I study it closely, and, if I'm not mistaken, it looks like the address is set in Vignelli's own version of Bodoni called "Our Bodoni." This seems like a bad omen. I tear open the envelope, take out the letter, and there, in big capital letters, it says: "Dear Rudy: THE WAR IS OVER!" I nearly faint.

Vignelli anticipates that his involvement will shock the audience and this prospect amuses him. I like the way he thinks. We pay him a fee of \$1,500, which he'll donate to the AIGA.

During the process, he insists the poster panels should be placed such that, when unfolding the poster, the reader can view the panels without rotating the poster.

The poster comes back from the printer. It looks beautiful. Vintage Vignelli. I unfold it and... I'm horrified. I screwed up the panel placement! How did that happen? I hope Vignelli won't notice, but of course he does. Fortunately, no new war breaks out.

Later, people ask us whether we received permission from Vignelli to use his signature on the poster. They can't believe he actually designed it himself. They thought we copied Vignelli and then added his signature. I'm sure Massimo will be amused.

42

1997

Up to this point, we print *Emigre* in small quantities of 3,000-5,000 copies. There's a romanticism associated with small-scale publishing. It allows for creating work without much compromise or concern for being misunderstood. It encourages risk-taking and experimentation. And by publishing material of an open-ended nature, editors of a small magazine can provide a forum for dialog with their readers.

Other factors, logistical and practical, make small-scale publishing enjoyable, but we never stop wondering about the potential size of *Emigre's* audience. Would more people buy the magazine if it were cheaper? Would our circulation increase if we gave our resellers better terms? Or was our small but dedicated readership simply the result of the magazine's esoteric nature? Since publishing literally means "to make public," I wondered if our method of small-scale publishing was defeating its own purpose.

To put this idea to a test, we print 43,000 copies, up from 6,000, and make the magazine free to our list of nearly 40,000 customers. It's the first issue printed in full color. It's a huge financial risk but a great opportunity to get our ideas out and show our fonts in action to a large audience. Total printing and prepress cost is \$36,000, plus \$19,000 for mailing them out. The increased circulation allows us to sell a handful of ads bringing in just under \$10,000.

After the issue comes out, there's a steep increase in typeface sales that helps offset the cost of printing. Letters to the editor increase as well, with many complaining about the fact that we now run ads. To them, we sold out. The biggest surprise, however, is the number of self-published projects designers send me as a thank you for receiving the magazine. The sheer volume makes it look like they're either all out of work and have a lot of

time on their hands, or they're all closet entrepreneurs, ready to make their own products and drop their clients.

43**1997**

I'm about to hand over a stack of *Emigre* magazines to curator Aaron Betsky at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco. He stops me and says, "Wait a minute." He opens a drawer and removes two white gloves. He slips them on. "Okay," he says, then receives the magazines from me. It's the most respectful gesture my magazine has yet received. The museum just acquired all *Emigre* back issues for their permanent collection. I walked in with a bunch of cheaply printed magazines, but, within these hallowed halls, they're treated like treasures, like art. Standing there, in the catacombs of the museum, surrounded by major art, I wonder if it can get any better. But each time they exhibit our work, they screw up the credits. They attribute all the work solely to me, despite my effort to always credit our collaborators, and they often leave out Zuzana's name. This bums me out. Design is a complicated, collaborative process, and museums have yet to figure out how to properly credit the work. I feel like I'm not supposed to complain, that as a graphic designer I ought to be happy just to have our work in a museum.

People often ask how it is that we receive so many letters to the editor. They suspect I actively solicit them.* Humble writers request that I not publish their excellent letters, but I'm able to change their minds. On occasion, I encourage people to expand on a letter, but I've never persuaded anyone to initiate one.

I've always wondered why we attract such a terrific response. I'd like to think that our articles hit nerves, but I'm sure there's more to it. *Eye*, *Print*, and the *AIGA* Journal publish terrific articles, too. Yet their letters columns are tiny. Maybe it is because *Emigre* looks a bit more funky; perhaps due to the uncoated stock we print on. It doesn't have an authoritarian feel to it. It looks accessible. It changes. It isn't afraid to fail and make a fool of itself. It's a spectacle, and it welcomes and inspires debate and writing of all kinds and all levels.

Many letters are addressed to me personally: "Hey, Rudy!" instead of "Dear Mr. Editor" or "Dear *Emigre*" (which I add to all letters). People seem comfortable approaching us. They're not intimidated by what we do, and perhaps that makes it easier for them to write us. I often reply to the letter writers, thanking them for their time, and telling them we'll publish their letter in the next issue. People seem to like that.

In hindsight, I should not have published some of the letters, or at least I should have edited them. Some were nasty personal attacks, such as the ones aimed at Steven Heller in response to his interview in *Emigre* #30. I guess People don't take kindly to having their work called ugly. But the idea was to publish all letters, unedited, positive and negative. Steve is not afraid to voice his opinion, and he got it from both barrels. He was a very good sport about it.

* For this final issue, #69, I did invite friends and colleagues to write letters, but for all other issues, the letters arrive unsolicited.

45**1998**

By now the magazine's prepress is completely digital. *Emigre* is printed in Denver on a high-speed web offset press, and the magazines are mailed out to our customers directly from there. Instead of traveling to Denver to do press checks, which would be costly, I sign off on glossy, high-resolution, full-color proofs which arrive by ups. We see printed copies at the same time our customers do. I simply hope for the best. The results are no worse or better than when I did press checks, but I miss the interaction with the printers and strippers, and the happy accidents that often occurred before everything became digital. Accidents still happen, but now they usually result in costly upgrades.

46

1998

On KQED public television, a short documentary features a guy whose small company manufactures recycled paper.

I'm captivated. We find out he's in Berkeley. We visit him and he convinces us to print the next *Emigre* on 100% recycled paper, 50% of which is post-consumer waste.

It's the first time we buy our paper from a mill instead of our printer. It's not an easy decision. Because the paper is custom-made, the company insists on a 40,000 pound minimum order, which they call a "truckload" since the rolls fit neatly onto a single truck. This is enough paper for two issues of *Emigre*. Recycled paper costs more than regular paper, and the quality leaves much to be desired. Our nervous printer wonders who will pay for any "press down time" due to paper problems. Since it's my paper, I take all the risks.

Everything that could go wrong goes very wrong. The paper rolls break repeatedly. The uncoated surface of the paper creates an effect the pressman describes as a snowstorm. I'm glad I'm not there to do a press check. They would have killed me.

On the plus side, the paper specs assure us that we saved 414 full grown trees; 146,160 gallons of water; 99,876 kilowatt hours of electricity; and 1,461 pounds of air pollution. It feels good to save all these resources, although it sure costs a lot of money. That year, we skip our donations to Earth First! and the Sierra Club.

47

1998

Punk Planet magazine interviews Art Chantry, and they completely diss me and *Emigre*. He mentions that he talked to me once on the phone and describes me as a really uptight guy. My frequent fraternizing with academics doesn't help my cause either. According to *Punk Planet*, all academics are elitists, and I'm guilty by association. It's a cheap shot, and I'm immediately depressed. I don't mind being called uptight, but I'm not an intellectual. I'm not anti-intellectual. I'm just not an intellectual.

I can't deny I'm jealous of Chantry and *Punk Planet*, though, and their ability to always say things in such a devil-may-care straightforward manner. Maybe I'd hoped for their acceptance because I've always considered *Emigre* to be a fanzine, much like *Punk Planet*. After all, we're amateur editors, we're self-published, and we idolize many of the people we interview and feature. The reason we don't qualify, I presume, is because we are professional designers. A designed fanzine is an oxymoron.

48

1998

Zuzana and I feel like zombies. We haven't slept for three days. We're at the Jan van Eyck Academy in Maastricht, the Netherlands. We're on stage to receive the Charles Nypels Award. In attendance is the *creme de la creme* of Dutch design: Ootje Oxenaar, Karel Martens, Henk Elenga, Rick Vermeulen, Jan van Toorn, Armand Mevis, Gerard Unger, and my former boss at Vorm Vijf, Joop de Ridder.

We each receive a big blue box containing a white plate and a plastic widget. The plates have madly crisscrossing lines creating haphazard rectangular shapes filled with tiny red type. It looks like some kind of device to measure the movement of heavenly bodies. I'm too dizzy from sleep deprivation and nervousness to realize what it is. Later I find out the text on the plate is a spoof on the language used to praise movies in American magazines. The clear plastic widget is a small stand to hold the plate. It's designed by Armand Mevis.

They've put us up in the school's guest quarters. The minimalist modern design looks good, but it's super noisy (sound-proofing the walls apparently received the minimalist treatment as well). We can't sleep and fail to recuperate from our jet lag. We have not been reimbursed for our travel expenses, and Zuzana blows her top when she's told not to worry, the check's in the mail. I tell her to take it easy, but I know that without her persistence and keen business sense, *Emigre* would be in bad financial shape. Still, the incident leads to a nasty fight between us. We're bad travelers.

49**1999**

By this time, Carson and I hate each other. We've been exchanging unpleasantries at every opportunity. In *I.D.* magazine I'm quoted as saying he's a one-trick pony, while he disses our work in his lectures. This goes on like a ping-pong game. Tit for tat.

I have lunch with Rick Poynor in London to discuss the *Emigre* book he has proposed to write for Laurence King. If a book is ever published, I ask Rick, can we please leave out mention of Carson? Every time *Emigre* is mentioned in design books or magazines, so is Carson, and vice versa. We're joined at the hip. Carson resents the connection, and so do I. Later I regret having brought up the question, but it's a moot point as the *Emigre* book idea never takes off. Meanwhile, Carson sells 150,000 copies of his book, *The End of Print*.

50

1999

Chris Dixon at *Adbusters* organizes a collaborative publishing of the updated *First Things First* manifesto. The manifesto, originally written in 1964 by Ken Garland and rewritten for this occasion, challenges graphic designers to put their talents to use in areas besides advertising, marketing, and brand development.

Chris asks if Zuzana and I would like to sign the manifesto and publish it in *Emigre*. He asks us to recommend other designers who might be willing to sign the manifesto. I send him a list of designers who regularly collaborate with me on *Emigre*.

The manifesto undergoes many rewrites, and with each pass it seems weaker; too many cooks in the kitchen. But I like the basic sentiment. It shifts the focus away from design as a purely commercial activity and suggests that designers look elsewhere for meaningful work. With *Emigre*, I've tried to create a forum for alternative views to the consumer-driven culture that dominates most of the design profession. Instead of looking at graphic design purely as a service industry, I was eager to hear and see what designers would choose to do on their own.

I'm sure the manifesto will rub people the wrong way. But there's nothing like a bold statement such as *First Things First* to find out what people's underlying motivations are. To make sure people will read the manifesto, I position it prominently on the cover of *Emigre* #51 and hold my breath.

51**1999**

It's a long shot. I send Captain Beefheart a letter asking permission to reprint his poem "81 Poop Hatch" in *Emigre* #51. I want to publish it alongside my photos of abandoned shacks in the Mojave Desert. I don't have his home address, so I send the request, along with a mock-up, to his New York gallery. Weeks pass. No reply. I call the gallery. Yes, they did get the package. No, they don't think it's a good idea. Why not? *Emigre* is not the appropriate forum. Not the appropriate forum? The secretary sounds like a snob. Disappointed, I feel better picturing how she must have winced when she had to say the words "poop hatch."

I track down the Captain's home address. Again I mail off the request. The next week, I receive a letter from his wife, Jan. She kindly grants permission to print the poem, at no charge, and tells me Don liked the photos and the layout. I know she's being polite, but I feel victorious.

52

1999

Responses to the *First Things First* manifesto 2000 stream in. According to the critics, our idealism will render our well-intended actions impotent. We are too naive to see the underlying structures aligned against us. Many critics find comfort in surrendering to the inevitability of the *status quo*. Politically savvy and cynical, they seem too smart for their own good, too smart to waste time making an effort. Are we all doomed to live out lives we have little or no control over? I want to think it shouldn't be controversial to search for alternatives.

53**2000**

The Pentagram office in San Francisco invites us to lend our names to a paper promotion they're working on.

We ask whether the paper contains any post-consumer recycled content. They tell us no, it does not. We pass on the opportunity.

Weeks later, at our friend Bob's house, Bob flashes a postcard from a paper company and cries, "Hey, guys, you're famous!" The postcard is part of the paper promotion we had just declined to participate in, and it has our names on it. That part of the campaign had already been launched before they asked us to participate. They never imagined we'd say no.

Within graphic design, any form of exposure is seen as an opportunity for the designer, not the other way around. The prevailing understanding is that graphic designers love the spotlight and will do anything for the exposure. They'll even endorse products for free. As a graphic designer, you can't sell out, even if you want to.

54

2000

Zuzana's on my case about the small storage room in the back of our office. "When are you going to clean it up?"

she wants to know. The room started out as our library, well organized and tidy, but soon it became a receptacle for the never-ending stream of designer projects sent to us each week. These unsolicited, self-authored, and self-produced posters, magazines, books, videos, CDs, and DVDs that arrive from all corners of the world were sent to us by people hoping we would show them in *Emigre*, or by people saying "thank you for your magazine, here's mine." The work echoes the *Emigre* spirit: research projects, visual essays, political tracts, personal investigations. Mostly self-initiated work made by designers without the interference of a client, focus groups, or the intent to make money.

What to do with all this material? I'm reminded of Piet Schreuders's method of organizing collections by publishing them, and I decide to turn the work into an issue of *Emigre*. I sift through the hundreds of submissions and eventually whittle it down to 252 pieces. With Zuzana's help, it takes us two weeks to photograph them all. The photography takes place in my home studio. Zuzana is positioned against my closet doors, wears museum-quality white gloves, and a black sweater. She holds each piece up while I photograph it with our new digital camera. We publish the images alongside an essay by Kenneth FitzGerald.

After the issue is published, I again follow Piet Schreuders's example, and with heavy heart I discard all the work, except for a few favorite pieces. Our little room looks neat again. Zuzana's happy, and so am I.

A few weeks after the issue comes out, Aaron Betsky at SFMO-MA asks me if I'd consider showing the work in an exhibition. I have to tell him the work no longer exists. I feel like I just killed someone.

55

2000

This often happens. I'm doing inventory and come across a box of back issues I thought were sold out. It's filled with copies of *Emigre* #16, dated 1990. It makes me very happy.

Not only is this the issue in which we announced the launching of Emigre Music, our attempt at releasing music CDs, but it's also the only *Emigre* issue that sports a hand-printed cover. Inside are interviews with the musicians whose CDs we released, plus a conversation with Bruce Licher who inspired us to explore this new musical direction, and who also printed the covers.

Bruce runs a small independent record company and designs and prints his own album covers on a hand-fed Vandercook 219 letterpress. Like Piet Schreuders, he's largely self-taught and has an uncanny ability to combine less than perfect typefaces into startlingly simple layouts that are, perhaps paradoxically, as dynamic and powerful as anything you'll ever see, and that I can't seem to duplicate no matter how hard I try. Under the guise of an interview, I pick his brain on how to operate a music label.

The cover of the issue is a story all by itself. We hire Bruce to design and print the cover, a challenge he eagerly accepts. The print run of 6,000 takes four days to print. In order to break the monotony, each day a different color is used, generating four differently colored covers. To save money on shipping, Bruce suggests that his assistant Steve should personally hand-deliver the covers to the Emigre office.

Braving temperatures of well over 90 degrees, Steve travels a gruesome four-hundred miles from Los Angeles (where IPR is based) to the Emigre office in Berkeley and not without incidents. The six tons of paper had weighed down "Beethoven" (his 1964 VW bus) significantly, which resulted in a blown tire as Steve was barreling down Highway 5 at 80 mph (coming down the Grapevine Grade into the valley with six tons of chipboard

aboard speeds up any car surprisingly well). Miraculously, Steve manages not to crash, changes tires while risking his life again, and safely delivers the 6,000 hand-printed covers without a scratch on them (or him).

The box I recover during inventory contains twenty copies each of the four differently colored covers, for a total of 80 extra back issues to sell. I price them at \$50 per copy. This one, I feel confident, is worth the extra charge.

56**2000**

Tim Starback, our office manager, receives an offer to work for Adobe Systems in Palo Alto. We can't match the salary they're offering him.

Tim's been with us for nearly ten years. He's done everything for us: packing orders, setting up our first bulletin board to sell typefaces online, testifying before a congressional committee regarding software piracy, hiring and firing the few employees who work at our warehouse. He's become an indispensable part of the company.

We offer him a raise and remind him that the corporate culture at Adobe will be very different from the culture at Emigre and that wearing shorts may be frowned upon there. It's the best we can offer. We hold our breath as Tim thinks it over. He'll let us know the following Monday.

When Tim chooses Emigre, we breathe a huge sigh of relief. It reminds us how vulnerable you become when you have a small company and you come to rely on only one or two people. But we wouldn't have it any other way.

57

Nothing much happens, that I can remember.

2001

58**2001**

Our friend Mo invites us out for dinner with John Martin and his wife Barbara, the owners and operators of Black Sparrow Press and therefore the publishers of Charles Bukowski and John Fante, two of my favorite authors. We meet at their house outside of Santa Rosa. I'm not sure what impresses me more: John's complete collection of first-edition signed Bukowski and Fante books, which occupy an entire wall of his house, or the fact that Barbara still designs every Black Sparrow Press book cover using a parallel rule, paste up, and transparent overlays. It's 2001.

During dinner, I ask John what I should tell people who write in to complain about Fante's racist remarks in the excerpt from his 1939 essay which we're about to reprint. Tell them to go fuck themselves, he advises.

John says he's never taken a vacation in his life. He works seven days a week and loves it. Half a year later, I read that the Martins have sold Black Sparrow Press and are retiring from the publishing business for good. I wonder what it will be like to stop publishing *Emigre*.

59

2001

At the annual Atypi conference in Rome, I chat with Robin Kinross. The conversation quickly turns to Jeffery Keedy.

He seems to have an aversion to just about anything Keedy writes and doesn't like his politics, either. Kinross explains that he was never engaged in the legibility arguments, but he felt compelled to point out the misuse of linguistic theory, in particular the kind coming from Cranbrook. I suggest that this kind of theory was not the driving force behind the work, that many of the students I met at Cranbrook had never read much linguistic theory, that it was only a small group who had, and that there were many different forces at work that resulted in the questioning of typographic rules that resulted in the so-called legibility wars during the late Eighties.

I ask if Kinross ever felt he and Keedy were simply talking about different areas of design, with Kinross's arguments concerning the design of lengthy texts and informational graphics, and Keedy's concerning other areas of design, such as magazines, book covers, catalogs, and posters. Kinross admits newspapers, not books, are the central object for him in design. I'm confused. Kinross has rarely been specific about this.

Later, by email, he explains that "Newspapers are forums for public dialog. They are collectively produced and 'undesigned' and, through the process of daily publication and letters to the editor, allow a continuity and frequency of discussion that books don't allow." I get the odd feeling that, politics aside, we have much more in common than past arguments suggest.

2001

James Sidlo calls to say he's quitting the army; he's sick of working on those F-16s. He thinks the Army's going down the drain, and he's taking one of those Microsoft courses to become a certified systems engineer. When I ask him how Ross is doing, he tells me he's still unemployed, wrecked his back working as a gardener. He's holed up in his house working on new songs. It's all he does.

Ross occasionally drops a cassette in the mail with two or three new tracks on it. I'm always amazed. I ask James what he thinks of the music, but he hasn't heard the final results. He and Lisa go in once in a while to record some guitar and drum parts and then leave. Same for the other musicians. Ross is the only one who knows what the end result sounds like.

Months later, a CD-R master arrives in the mail. "Here's Honey Barbara's second album," Ross writes in his note. "17 tracks total. Hope you like it." It's an unbelievable gem, put together in complete isolation, which accounts for its alien pop sound. Besides Ross, I'm the only person in the world who has heard this album. It's strange not being able to share your excitement with others over something you love so much. There was only one thing to do: publish it.

I feature Honey Barbara's album as the main content of *Emigre* #60. Both Zuzana and Tim look at me like I'm nuts. "What does music have to do with design?" they ask. "Nothing," I say. "But the way we'll package it will."

I design a custom cardboard folder that accommodates the CD, as well as a small magazine. We produce 36,000 copies and give them away for free. It costs \$40,000 to print the issue and press the CDs, and \$15,000 to mail it to 35,000 of our customers. It's an expensive way to share your love for something, and the responses don't always satisfy my hopes. One guy writes to say

he's disappointed the cd didn't contain any free fonts. Another reprimands us for misbehavior and advises us to act right and market our fonts like Adobe. Despite our unusual marketing strategy, type sales spike once again, and Honey Barbara is interviewed on Texas Public Radio.

61**2002**

Tim leaves a distressing voicemail message. We'd asked him to send a mass email announcement. People are receiving it and they're furious. They want to be removed from our mailing list immediately. Tim pulls the plug, but over 5,000 emails have already been sent to some of our top customers. It's September 25, 2001.

The email contained a letter by Bay Area activist Anuradha Mittal. In the letter, she asks people to contact their Congressional representatives and senators and let them know that "As Americans we want peace, and that this is an opportunity to forge a broader international coalition to bring disparate nations together in a common determination to fight against all crimes against humanity."

The letter expresses our feelings pretty well. Graphic design seemed utterly useless in the face of the horrific events of September 11. Direct political action mattered most. I decided to send the email to our mailing list to encourage people to contact their representatives.

For weeks, email replies pile up in our inbox while the phones won't stop ringing. Some say we should stick to typeface design. Others assure us we'll burn in hell with the terrorists. Many promise never to do business with Emigre again. We're stunned.

62

2002

I'm on the phone with Elliott Earls. He's upset and disappointed. I've postponed publishing his *Catfish* DVD. It was to be our second issue with aural content. Elliott has worked on this project for years. It's an amazing hybrid of graphic design and performance art. I promised to publish it, but now I have doubts. *Catfish* is loud, obnoxious, experimental, strange, with references to war and death and Hitler. And then there's all the unusual stuff.

I've never been this unsure about what it means to publish something, never been so self-conscious. *Catfish* is a difficult project to publish under any circumstances, but after 9/11 everything seems amplified. How will people respond? Why should I care? What's the purpose of publishing anything? Should the work be uplifting and positive, or should it expose our failures and be critical of what we do? The most basic questions about what we're doing all of a sudden come rushing to the surface. So I procrastinate and delay *Catfish* for a few months. Elliott uses the time to fine-tune the project and make it even stranger.

63**2002**

After 19 years of publishing and distributing *Emigre* ourselves, I search for a publisher to handle distribution and pay for printing. Princeton Architectural Press in New York jumps at the opportunity. We shrink the magazine by two-fold once again and return to publishing design writing almost entirely. It's a simple deal: *Emigre* delivers a ready-made magazine in PDF format and Princeton prints 6,000 copies. Instead of an honorarium, they give us 2,500 copies to sell on our web site while they distribute the remaining 3,500. We reinstate paid subscriptions, but only 2,000 people plop down the \$28 for four issues.

64**2003**

We completely reorganize our business. Heads roll, we move our warehouse to Emeryville, and, when the dust settles, it's Zuzana and me again. Tim works from his home in Davis. We've come full circle and we love it! Every Monday, Zuzana and I work in the warehouse, filling orders, folding T-shirts, shipping out magazines. People still send us resumes. One person seeks an entry-level editorial position, another wants to know if there is an opening for an assistant CEO. Emigre Inc. is a three-person company, but many don't believe it.

65**2003**

I decide to do four more issues, mostly to satisfy my obligation to subscribers. I feel like Brian Wilson trying to fulfill his contract with Capitol Records before moving on to Warner Bros., except I'm no genius.

I always imagined publishing 100 issues of *Emigre* magazine and then calling it quits, smashing my guitar onstage and swaggering off into the smoke, or something like that. A hundred issues seemed possible. At two issues per year, I would have reached that goal at age 64.

66

2004

Sales of *Emigre* magazine are declining, according to Kevin at Princeton. In the past, this would have concerned me, but now the news feels strangely inconsequential. I'm excited about life after *Emigre* magazine. After #69, I hope to clear my mind of twenty years of design discourse. I'm reminded of Ed Fella's motto in *Emigre* #30: all he wants to do in his repose is wallow in aesthetic self-indulgence. Sounds like a good way to start again.

67**2004**

Letters to *Emigre* have dwindled to about two or three per issue. On Speak Up, the online design forum, hundreds of designers discuss anything and everything. It's difficult to compete against daily short opinion pieces and the instant replies in which logo redesigns of large corporations receive most of the attention. The fury reminds me of the heyday of *Emigre*, except we occasionally challenged the *status quo*, while the Speak Up crowd wants to maintain it as best they can. Today, it isn't cool to go against the grain. Michael Bierut reads my intro in *Emigre* #66 and senses doom. He tells me not to stop. Michael is one of the great cheerleaders in graphic design.

68

One more issue to go.

2005

69

Thanks for reading *Emigre*.

2005



EMIGRE NO. 69

DEAR EMIGRE



**FRIENDS & COLLEAGUES
BID FAREWELL**



Dear Big Emigre,

Of all the reasons *Emigre* will be missed, certainly the most important is its dedication to experimentation.

During the tabloid-sized years, 1984-1994, it engaged in something akin to what scientists refer to as “basic science”: exploring the very core of a thing with no immediate, practical end in sight. While the writing was topical and thoughtful, the real justification for the magazine was its stimulating and challenging visual content. The magazine’s appearance and *raison d’être* was wrongly tied to the advent of the Macintosh computer by many critics and historians. Technology’s importance to *Emigre* was reflected primarily in the facility of its production. Conceptual and philosophical inspiration arose more from the cultural and intellectual times and the daring of its proprietors.

The magazine was physically big during that time: eleven by seventeen inches. This meant it was hard to ignore and difficult to hide. While later incarnations of the magazine had a dramatically increased circulation, improved writing and interesting articles, the smaller size seemed to lessen its influence.

Depending upon your age, education, achievements, and beliefs, *Emigre* could delight or anger you—or both. These conflicting notions energized designers around the world and precipitated endless thought and dispute. Debates over basic issues such as the nature of reading and personal aesthetics dominating client messages played out through impassioned “letters to the editor.” These topics would often spill over on to the pages of most every other graphic design publication, along with articles about the magazine’s corrupting influence or spiritual honesty. The magazine’s ability to inspire interest and emotions managed to make graphic design, typography, and font design topics of discussion in mainstream newspapers and magazines.

The arrival of a copy of the “big” *Emigre* could send an entire design school into turmoil. Single copies changed hands so many times they soon took on the character of a fine old piece of boys’ school pornography. Some design teachers considered the magazine to be design pornography. A Swiss-trained German friend

from a well-known school once loudly told me that he “hated” *Emigre*: “My students hide in the back of the studio and look at that damned magazine and don’t pay any attention to me.”

In professional offices the arrival of one of those deceptive, plain, brown cardboard-wrapped packages containing an issue of the big *Emigre* was cause for great excitement. It also signaled to many a studio head another anguishing round of disputes with young designers over legibility and client tolerances.

Slowly, over a ten-year period, new and more adventurous design work began to appear from small studios and then from larger established firms. In education, the magazine’s influence headed many schools away from uninspired adherence to Swiss doctrine, and others away from a shallow, decorative practice toward a broader, more experimental, and sometimes theory-based approach.

Emigre’s belief in experimentation made for exciting times. Its constant barrage of visual exploration and analysis invigorated graphic design like no other publication might have ever done.

CHUCK BYRNE, *Oakland, CA*

Dear *Emigre*,

End of an Era: Post-Alt-Emigrés.

Pop culture seems to be in a continuous process of reinvention nowadays. It’s always tweaking and adjusting itself around the edges. This restlessness functions as cultural camouflage: it’s hard to take critical aim at a moving target, much less locate an alternative. This explains in part how pop culture seems to be an alternative culture for which there is no alternative. Graphic designers in the post-Internet world probably find it hard to imagine the hegemony of a predigital mainstream design culture centered in New York City. Just look at *Emigre* magazine numbers 30 and 31 to get a sense of what it was like. The emergence and convergence of digital technology, graduate design programs, critical theory, and the increasing professionalization of graphic design made for some serious growing pains in the 80s and 90s, many of which were documented only in *Emigre*.

For graphic designers, the typical path to success is to create a

“signature style” (make sure it is easy to copy) and then validate and promote it through design competitions, web sites, publications and conferences. The final step is the all-important autobiographical monograph through which you will shove yourself onto the design history bookshelf, only to spend your golden years reciting anecdotes and denigrating the next generation from a position of well-earned self-importance. The alternate route that Rudy and Zuzana took was to follow their hearts and heads instead of the logic of the marketplace. From bitmapped fonts and barely-under-control layouts to Mrs Eaves and some of the most ripped-off designs in print, *Emigre* is a record of a couple of good designers becoming great designers. By doing their own promotion and seeking validation and criticism from their own network of peers, they were able to enjoy a far greater freedom of style and content than those in the mainstream.

That is, after all, the whole point to taking an alternate route. Making less money and being unknown doesn’t automatically make you alternative and cool; it just means you are poor and unpopular.

Emigre represents a successful alternative. They became their own typesetter, font foundry, record label, publisher, and distributor, practicing what they preached with a *DIY* approach. But that’s not really such a big deal anymore, is it? Now almost anyone can create their own magazine, fonts, music, and even movies, and sell them from just about anywhere. *Emigre*’s mandate is less urgent now that everyone “ignores boundaries.” What we now consider mainstream design is more depressive than oppressive. Now that everyone is autonomous, you are your own *avant-garde*. But the transition from *avant-garde* upstart to has-been happens quickly. That’s why designers stopped looking for “the next big thing.” Now they look for what’s coming after it. So where does that leave us? Perhaps now we’re all *émigrés* because it doesn’t matter where you are from when you no longer know where you are, much less where you are going.

There has always been a conflict in design between the desire to standardize, systematize, and regulate and the desire to be an

expressive, experimental individualist. Design history of the 20th century is the story of how these conflicting creative impulses were reconciled. At the beginning of the century, artists and architects like Klee, Kandinsky, and Gropius began to systematize experimentation and rationalize expression at the Bauhaus. By mid-century, commercial artists in the advertising industry created a pop culture with a mass-media machine that continues to regulate our concepts of individuality and self-expression with celebrity icons. The century culminated with the ultimate reconciliation by institutionalizing a standard system of expressive, experimental identity known as "branding." By effectively solving problems, organizing information, increasing legibility, and resolving contradictions, design has become little more than a manifestation of cultural mediocrity. With no boundaries and no alternative.

R.I.P. *Emigre* magazine.

MR. KEEDY, *Los Angeles, CA*

Dear *Emigre*

In my last (and first) essay for *Emigre* I closed by saying: "Graphic Design can be art; it's just unfortunate that it so rarely is." No one asked what I meant by that. So I will tell you. I meant that it's unfortunate that a profession so prideful of its ability to persuade has persuaded itself that its powers of persuasion are best applied to the modern equivalent of hawking vacuum cleaners door-to-door. I meant it is unfortunate that so much design "theory" has been so preoccupied with form versus function, the theoretical equivalent of a dog chasing its tail. It is unfortunate that this dog has been chasing its tail for the past sixty plus years while much more meaningful issues have been ignored. Issues like why is it taken for granted that graphic design is either a slave to corporate culture, even if it is fighting that culture, or tool for abject self-aggrandizement? In all cases the unmentioned underlying assumption is that graphic design's sole purpose is to sell. Whether it be selling vacuums, politics, or me. It is unfortunate that a medium literally bursting with such persuasive potential cannot seem to realize that some of the most valuable things in life have no quantifiable func-

tional value. Can anyone tell me the functional value of opera? I can't figure it out for the life of me, but the one opera I have attended left me moved to the core—that seems pretty valuable to me. Let me be clear: There is *nothing* necessarily wrong with selling vacuum cleaners. We all have to survive. But justifying laziness, or lack of gumption, or lack of creativity by appealing to basic survival is just a cop out. To the profession that prides itself on problem solving I pose a problem: Why do so few of you make graphic design that moves me like art? To the other 17 people who are actually reading this: *Emigre* is dead...

JOSHUA RAY STEPHENS, *Brooklyn, NY*

Dear Emigre,

May 30th 2005: I wake up in Point Reyes, one of the most dramatic landscapes in California, if not the entire earth, and it's a little depressing, since I know I have to get up and leave. A long weekend immersed in verdant green is over and I have to face the long drive back to Los Angeles, back to reality, and the deadline for saying goodbye to *Emigre* is hanging over my head. My car joins the slipstream of the I-5 South, speeding through the vast, vast industrial farmland of the San Joaquin Valley, past apricot farms, pistachio farms, grape farms, almond farms, thousands of head of cattle and sheep. The scale of sublime California landscapes—man-made and divine—that I have seen in the last few days seems to dwarf the world of design as I know it. It's hard to put this place together with what I have experienced here. I have my own anniversary, twenty years of living and working in Los Angeles, yet I am still stuck with the question of whether or not I am of this place. As soon as I arrived I recognized, like so many others, that something felt different about the possibilities here: you could be or do anything since you were somehow dwarfed by the sheer sprawl of space. But the question was whether or not the work one did would ever be noticed, what community would ever notice or respond in kind. You had to do what you could to build your own space, your own community, and of course that is part of the California dream: to build from scratch, to redefine, to begin

again. How thankful I am to have been an émigré to this place at the same time as those other émigrés, Rudy and Zuzana! How lucky to share a project, or at least the sense of work to be done! Driving through this vastness, I think of those words we use now, like “virtual community,” to describe everything from contact with one’s fellow geeks to wide-ranging networks of support and critique, the opposite of these extremely un-virtual landscapes—a floating world. *Emigre* has existed on paper, its material the evidence of dedication and commitment, a space unto itself—and it was definitely part of my neighborhood, one that nurtured and encouraged me, a place that I am very sad to lose. However, I know (from Rudy’s photographs) that the émigrés are observant of this very same California landscape that confounds me, and that the question of what to do next, in this huge and mutable but auspicious space, confronts us all. I can only be thankful, and fascinated to see what space they stake out next.

LORRAINE WILD, *Los Angeles, CA*

Dear Emigre,
Thank you.

When I was in art school studying graphic design, our mantra was “the best typography never gets noticed.” (This was before the Macintosh and before *Emigre*. Before the genie was out of the bottle.) A doctrine of creative asceticism was hammered into us in a class called *Lettering 1*, and again in *Lettering 2*, and later in *Advanced Lettering*. These “lettering” classes consisted, initially, of lots of rote pencil renderings of phrases like “the best typography never gets noticed” and “the pitfalls of lettering” in everything from Caslon to Bodoni, on white Graphics Pads (It was a brand of paper ... the likes of which... Oh, never mind.) We also had numerous marker rendering classes that were required, a vestige of the Darren Stevens era of Comprehensive Layout Technique. My technical skill with a rack of Design™ markers, a type specimen book, and something called a proportion wheel would stand me in good stead with my first employer. But long before the formal education was even close to paid for, that same skill set would be completely

outmoded, the education itself arcane, quaint, and obsolete.

Worst collegiate timing, ever.

In the final days before my graduation from art school, a Macintosh arrived in our newly formed computer lab. No one could tell me what it was to be used for and I wasn't sticking around to find out. A year or so later I saw *Emigre* for the first time. A year or so after that I goofed around for the first time with the graphical user interface. I still didn't get it, really. ("You mean I can do my *mechanicals on this thing?*") Whether I realized it or not though, my second education in "lettering" was underway.

Emigre was the midwife to a second design education we would all undergo and enact, like it or not. We called it a revolution, but that's because we were young and full of ourselves. By the time the legibility pissing contests were over with, even the arthritic old guard was standing on the shores of a New World, one where design theory, discourse, semiotic navel-gazing, culture-jamming, ad-busting, X-treme deconstructionist stuntmanship, neomodernism, even a rediscovery of ornament and filigree would (first) get in the way of, and (later) come to redefine what it meant to be a designer of graphics. Where the territory itself, never mind what came with it, would be redefined, broadened, befouled, recultivated, even exalted. For design, by design, etc. etc. Typography, good and bad, would never again go unnoticed. Nor would "lettering." Not if *we* had anything to say about it.

Desktop publishing (as it was once called) paved the way for the designers to assume authorship of their work, which was liberating and empowering. But it also visited upon the designer added and greater responsibilities. First of which was the responsibility to become a typesetter. (And we rose to the occasion, I guess. Typesetting houses went the way of the dodo bird and the stat camera. And the world didn't grind to a halt.) But also the accountability that comes with authorship. Accountability that used to rest on the shoulders of the client is now often assumed by the graphic designer, who not only *performs* graphic design services, but *uses* graphic design, for his or her *own* purposes, *as a tool for shaping or coping with or responding to his or her world*. Who'da thought?

That's still new. Whether it amounts to a cultural revolution or a kind of advanced art therapy, it's something that was unheard of not so long ago. And it's something *Emigre* has fostered, well-nigh invented.

In my view, if you chart the course of *Emigre* from its beginnings up to the present, it does follow a kind of K thru 12 maturation process, from its earlier primary experimentations and brattiness, to its scheming teenage "let's put out our own music" phase, right on up to its most recent efforts to elevate and moderate a sustained scholarly discourse. And now, apparently, *Emigre* magazine is going into early retirement.

And why not?

You have certainly gone the distance, *Emigre*. And then some. So say the multitudes you have spawned. Long live *Emigre*.

Ever,

SHAWN WOLFE, *Seattle, WA*

Dear *Emigre*,

Remember the eighties? Amsterdam was a happening place then. It always has been. Considering myself in the center of the world, I was young and eager for changes in attitude and expression. I was looking for an originality that would distinguish me from the rest of the world, with a strong opinion on how it was and how it was supposed to be. And then there you were.

Every other month I would check for your presence in the only place in the Netherlands to get it at the time: the Island Bookstore. You spearheaded an international movement of changes in design thinking and typography, and I felt very much part of that, with the new digital technology of desktop computers on our side.

But once you started to intellectualize and theorize through your design discourse, I somehow lost interest. It seemed very American to add such a scientific value to a profession that to me always had a primarily visual, intuitive, and expressive foundation. Analysis prior to a process will kill the results. Inventions and innovations are the outcome of experimentation and error. Analysis afterwards always works better anyway. Talent is mysterious and indefinable.

DEAR EMIGRE

Thanks for being part of my life. Ever since our first meeting in Amsterdam on that cold January morning in 1989, and now almost two decades later as neighbors in the magical San Francisco Bay Area, it feels as if we've helped each other to get where we are. And I hope you are as happy with it as I am, being an émigré myself now for a number of years. It must be that kind of displacement that is so fascinating to us and anyone else who is trying to push their boundaries, shaping their world and that of others. I guess that makes us different to begin with.

Accept my apologies that I haven't read all your critical articles, essays and reviews, and for failing to look for you as frequently as I used to. Still, you always have looked cool, dressed up so distinctly and sophisticated. You were worth picking up and flipping through, every time we met on the stands. Although you once advised (in *Emigre* #11, 1989) to "Keep on Reading," good design is made to look at, with an attitude, which is best expressed by the Dutch author Jan Cremer: "Niet lullen, maar poetsen."

Sincerely yours,

MAX KISMAN, *Mill Valley, CA*

Dear Emigre,

I discovered *Emigre* comparatively late in life—about issue #30. While I was vaguely aware of its influence on young designers (who used to bring it into our studio), it was not until about the mid-1990s that I really started to read your journal.

I call it a journal intentionally, because by that time it was not an oversized culture magazine about designers, nor was it merely a publication about typography. *Emigre* was a journal of design criticism and commentary at a time when graphic design was emerging from its professional shell to become a real discipline. Beyond *Print* and *Communication Arts*, before *Adbusters* and *Dot Dot Dot*, *Emigre* proved that smart, passionate designers also need to read, and that, in fact, a few can even write.

Despite the fact that its primary audience may have been working designers, *Emigre* proved over time that its real focus was on visual culture writ large. There was room for pundits and for par-

odists, and the work exhibited in this period took on a new critical stance. In an era that may go down in design history as a time of extreme introspection—a time during which so many designers questioned the authority of designer as author, producer or *auteur*—you produced a journal that testified to the perhaps unique strength of the designer as publisher.

I do not believe this is a small distinction, or, in fact, a minor evolution. In publishing *Emigre* you harnessed production, marketing, and distribution to create a small but seminal moment in which something happened in the intellectual life of the design discipline. (One is reminded of *The New York Times* newspaper strike in 1962 when the *New York Review of Books* emerged as a new voice—for many years, the voice of intellectual criticism and debate.) In its very idiosyncratic approach to intellectual engagement, *Emigre* became a publication that showed breadth, curiosity, and supreme intellectual independence. That it was produced outside of academia makes this all the more remarkable.

In publishing *Emigre* you created a new model that will inspire designers and design critics for years to come. You created a model outside of the mainstream media and, against all odds, you provided a vibrant forum for analysis, debate, and criticism that will, in the future, come to frame almost a decade of history. This is no small achievement.

WILLIAM DRENTTEL, *Falls Village, CT*

Dear Emigre,

Where's the party?

For more than twenty years, the best parties have been at Rudy and Zuzana's house. In attendance were friends, family, gate-crashers and even—like me—a few stray dogs. As always, the revelry wound down and everyone ended up in the kitchen rummaging around to satisfy an afterglow hunger. Then the real debates began. These semi-lucid (after a lot of drinking) discussions got very personal and rowdy—often pissing off the proper neighbors with real jobs (just check the "Letters" section of any issue). This unruly group shared a disregard for authority. Just what was this thing called

“graphic design” that required such decorum? When does graphic design happen? Why does it look the way it does? How can one define “beauty”? What’s the significance of different modes of practice? How does graphic design resist merely packaging culture and actively take part in critical analysis? Unruly questions; impertinent even. Graphic design is the perfect commodity fetish: multiple, easily consumed, and disposable. Perhaps this is our strength.

The practices of design and of design theory are emerging as equally distinct, equally legitimate concerns of the graphic designer. Examples abound. Recognizing that graphic design encompasses specific ways to see the world, North Carolina State University recently reorganized its ph.d. in Graphic Design into seven areas of interest. The editors of *Dot Dot Dot* state that “Whatever we decide to include makes it a graphic design magazine, if that’s what we still choose to call it.” Daniel van der Velden, while speaking of Armand Mevis and Linda van Deursen’s work, states, “Mevis and van Deursen demonstrated the merits of graphic design on its own, neither as a service to the public nor as a lesson to them.” And Louise Sandhaus claims “Writers use verbal language. Graphic designers use visual language. Graphic design deserves to be recognized as equally capable of representing thought through sophisticated and engaging visual form.” Unruly and impertinent. Graphic design is bustin’ out all over.

As *Emigre* becomes history (when can we expect *The Emigre Reader 1984–2005?*), the parties will continue, albeit at a new address.

Thank you, Rudy, for being such a good host.

DAVID CABIANCA, *Toronto, ON*

Dear Emigre,

I am sorry I missed the deadline. I would just say that *Emigre* has always been like the quiet person who patiently sits through a long, bombastic, argumentative group discussion and finally, when it seems like there’s nothing left to say, asks the one question that changes everything. The question has been different with every issue. But all those issues taken together have changed the way we

see design, the way we think about design, and the way we talk about design.

I will miss *Emigre*.

Best regards,

MICHAEL BIERUT, *New York, NY*

Dear *Emigre*,

I'm leaving the heavy thinking about your significance to graphic design to closer, astute observers. That *Emigre* was about design was incidental to me, even unfortunate. It was simply a 'zine that was smart, personal and personable, and unafraid to look different. Mostly, it seemed a clearinghouse for misfits, malcontents, and too-serious types into graphics/music/self-publishing. Like me!

I regard *Emigre* like a band that went from post-punk quartet to eclectic studio project—somewhere between Was (Not Was) and This Mortal Coil. Abetted by a diverse cast of characters, it indulged its quirky tastes, from alt-country to electronica. It was process music that sometimes yielded startling results. *Emigre* remained a cult item, though others scored hits covering the pop gems (e.g. "Mrs Eaves") that dot its releases. Eventually, the band brand becomes confining, so the principals go "solo."

My fantasy role as accompanist was that I represented an audience that didn't yet exist: culturally aware non-practitioners ready to contemplate design seriously. Naively, I imagined *Emigre* as a vehicle to reach/create them.

History shows it's the fringers, the dismissed, who transform everything (who knew the Bauhausers would hit it big, right?) But I regretted *Emigre* becoming an institution (institutionalizing is often done against the subject's will). Now, young designers display cool by asserting they *don't* listen to *Emigre*. Design's all attitude (you heard it here last), and the old guard must be supplanted. Certainly, plenty of reflexive iconoclasm happened during *Emigre's* heyday.

So, perhaps, *Emigre's* real contribution comes now: breaking the cycle of difference for its own sake. "You're right, kids—we're *passé*! 'Later!' "Uh-oh, *now* what do we do?"

DEAR EMIGRE

Of course, it's being done. New bands keep forming, many neither because of nor despite *Emigre*'s existence or departure. Still, your essential meaning is affirmed. As Peter Gabriel sings, *do it yourself*.

KENNETH FITZGERALD, *Norfolk, VA*

Dear Emigre,

Rudy, you may not recall the morning that you and Zuzana stopped by my *New York Times* office to explain your new direction for *Emigre*, but I do. You had just decided to shift your editorial focus from general culture exclusively to graphic design culture. Despite your enthusiasm, I wasn't really sure exactly what you meant. Were you going to become *CA* or *Print* for the computer age? What could you add that the old *Graphis* was not already providing? You implied that as a fan of design, you wanted to edit a fan magazine. And since Zuzana was designing, and Emigre Graphics was selling, new digital typefaces, the magazine would showcase these commercial experiments as well. I anxiously awaited the result.

But when the "new" *Emigre* arrived in the mail in its large cardboard box I was shocked and awed. Shocked by what I perceived as a curious disregard for modernist ideals, and awed by the passion you injected into this and subsequent issues. Although I was not happy about seeing this so-called new typography become the new fashion, I knew that you were unleashing something important.

Yet I admit for me this newness caused temporary blindness. So I devised a standard by which I measured *Emigre*. Having been weaned on tenets of journalism, I objected to the rambling interviews that you regularly published. "Who's editing this thing?" "Must we be subjected to every interviewee hiccup?" Of course I read them, but that just exacerbated my frustration. I was miffed by layouts that made my eyes into gymnasts: I found smashed, minuscule, degraded, and otherwise "unreadable" type flagrantly disrespectful. I worked myself into a tizzy, believing that Western civilization had totally declined, because I knew (especially from your letters column) that designers (many young, and some old) were embracing the methods of those you promoted. And, of

course, my indignation spewed forth in the “Cult of the Ugly” published in *Eye*. This one article sure prompted a retaliatory fire storm of acrimony and recrimination, much of it in your pages, but elsewhere as well. I really made your supporters mad, and had there been a blogosphere back then just imagine what the volume of posts would be like.

The ensuing debates proved that *Emigre* had touched raw nerves in flame-protecting critics like me. You combined a postmodern (not in the stylish sense of the word) spirit and technological aesthetic that influenced new (and newly viable) means of practice. My problem was I only saw what you did as style. In fact, what recent re-readings of *Emigre* from the nineties revealed to me is that this was a key era of graphic design when practitioners sought (and found) redefinition and purpose—you not only provided the forum, you instigated some of the thinking. Constructivists, Swiss Modernists, and even Psychedelists had their own critical outlets; for “digitalists,” *Emigre* went below the surface to the inner workings, indeed the heart (and perhaps the very art) of what is significant in graphic design—how best to mass communicate through codes, symbols, and metaphors. *Emigre* was a manual, though not always eliciting the best results from acolytes or imitators, for a new populist language.

In addition, I have also long respected your uncanny talent to transform the magazine as you see fit, even if sometimes you dismayed your loyal constituents. At each turn, I believed you did yourself in; however, in every case you triumphed—as one of your issues proclaimed, you started from zero, then you asked “What’s Next?” and led the way. You switched from tabloid to magazine, from magazine to CD, from CD to paperback book. In this last and final incarnation, you not only pushed the critical discourse, you contributed to its vitality, and this is not an easy accomplishment.

So, Rudy, despite my past criticism (though some of those interviews are still hard to plow through), I was wrong in the “The Cult of the Ugly” when I wrote *Emigre* would become “a blip in the continuum” of design history. Though a catchy coinage, it was a flawed prediction. You created an amazing entity and now a priceless his-

DEAR EMIGRE

torical document that is valuable because it defines an epoch, propagates a process, and encourages alternatives—warts and all.

Thanks,

STEVE HELLER, *New York, NY*

Dear Emigre,

Even though you've inspired me, thrilled me, angered me, and included me, I've never written you a letter in all these years. Now it's my last chance, but instead of a letter all I could muster was a sentimental collection of metadata—or perhaps more fittingly, an unwieldy epitaph of sorts:

Curator, booster, catalyst, critic, narrator, cool hunter, host, witness; dialogue, blather, banter, trash, discourse, interviews, overviews, reviews, gossip, in-fights, disputes, feuds, poses, provocations, critical positions; generous, spirited, responsive, rough, beautiful, open, ugly, smart; mottled, mixed, courageous, broad, meandering, thoughtful, outlandish, fickle; global, local, eclectic, exclusive; network, community, platform, zine, house organ, catalog, mouthpiece, rag; laboratory, play yard, garden, quilting bee, rodeo, circus, wrestling match, nest; circling the wagons, preaching to the choir, writing in the margins, throwing down the gauntlet, scratching the surface, setting the bar; influential, major, peripheral, precious, alternative, center, edge, edgy, trend-setting, style bible, news of the weird; relentless, searching, shifty, shifting, culling, collecting, ephemeral, archive; obscurant, jargon-laden, inquisitive, incestuous, pretentious, experimental, crackpot, mischievous, evangelical, inconsistent, high-minded, navel-gazing, maddening, tired; under-read, over-looked, looked over, gazed at, ogled, ripped-off, skinned; inspiration, resource, beacon, beam, pied piper, yell leader, siren, wind; grass roots, personal vision, collective voice, DIY, punk rock, entrepreneurial, enterprising, self-defining, pioneering, driven, passionate, committed; loved, hated, feared, bashed, revered, ignored, worshipped, scrutinized, obeyed, forgotten, adored; Macintosh, Hard Werken, il/legibility, imperfect type, post-structuralism, the vernacular (not), ugly cultists, grad school groupies, Nederlanders,

fellow readers, typophiles, theory apologists, form followers,
designer-author-*bricoleurs*;

all now history.

Thank you, dear *Emigre*, for everything.

ANNE BURDICK, *Los Angeles, CA*

Dear *Emigre*,

"Magazines are for looking at, not reading."

My daughter, at six.

She declared this as a warning. *Don't look too deeply here; the medium can't support it.*

At that age, she couldn't tell *Cricket* from *Pottery Barn for Kids*, and sometimes I can't distinguish magazine from catalog either. Magazines are a marriage of art and commerce, which is exactly where design lives, and when design lives, too: in the moment.

Fourteen when *Emigre* appeared, I lack the experience to comment on its history, given that magazines live in the moment and that, well, the magazine and I never shared a room until issue 65. A fan of the small literary journal, I loved *Emigre* as a paperback and had no idea that *Emigre* had, over the years, morphed almost as often as Michael Jackson's mug. I have pored over a selection of back issues, including the cds, but I've felt little excitement or inspiration. I attribute this to sentimentality: I prefer the romance of our first meeting, when *Emigre* wore that little green number.

Reviewing past issues, I can't fault *Emigre's* mission: to make it new. This is a modernist slogan, coined by poet Ezra Pound, who espoused new literary forms necessary to earn the attention of people flocking to radio and film. In our age of webcams and satellite tv, writers, designers, and artists must contend with even greater pressures to make it new. *Emigre* has sought the new in type design, photography, layout, and the subjects of its articles. Design criticism, metacriticism, personal obsessions, emotional purges, focused studies of a typeface: *Emigre's* editorial content has inspired me to see the world in a logo and not the world as a logo.

Design lives in two worlds, Art and Commerce, and its fertility as a concept will endure as long as its necessity as a practice

endures. Commerce exerts its pressures on Design to make it new (new products, inventions, efficiencies), and Art, for its part, will find ways to exert its peculiar pressures, via experiments in exuberance, perspective, waste, recklessness, and boring old hard work. Art, said Oscar Wilde, is useless, and Commerce, as we know, depends on utility. Design lives and breathes, amphibiously, in the oily waters of this tension.

Emigre has risked its share of experiments. Having read E46 set in Base and E59 set in Lo-Res fonts, I have legal standing to sue for negligent infliction of visual distress. And E56, the 16th anniversary issue, was half catalog and half photos of old computer equipment, and I hold it responsible for inspiring consumer magazines like *Gear and Stuff*, which are half catalogs and half photos of young female equipment. I appreciated E49, The Everything is for Sale Issue, for its *Utne Reader* strategy of rescuing and reprinting a broad selection of relevant essays so that designers might see themselves and the world from other points of view.

Emigre failed to breed readers. Its circulation numbers never matched those of the big guns. The subset of designers hungry for a diet of words on a fibrous page is, by implication, far smaller than the subset of designers hungry for the buffet of images in a glossy spread. This is not surprising. Almost by definition, literary, academic, and other small journals serve niche audiences that rarely exceed 5,000. Hopefully, however, *Emigre* bred a few designers and writers and critics, some of its inspired readers who will continue to look, wonder how to make it new—and risk doing something useless and unique.

DAVID BARRINGER, *Davidson, NC*

Dear Emigre,

To watch your magazine evolve over the past 20 years has been to watch my own life as a designer evolve, nearly always from a distance, rarely as an insider, usually out of sync. I graduated from The Cooper Union in 1985, just as the magazine was beginning. The birth of the magazine thus coincides with the start of my own trajectory through design as a medium and a discourse.

The magazine went through various stages, just like a human being. When *Emigre* appeared most exuberantly formalistic, in the late 80s and early 90s, I was in the most theoretical mindset of my own career, having taken a deep interest in critical theory and the post-formalist, postmodernist thinking that was taking place in the art world. It was in this period that Abbott Miller and I received our first (and only) invitation to contribute to the magazine: we wrote and designed an essay on structuralism and typography that we typeset in an awful cut of Bodoni on a Compugraphic digital/photo typesetting system.

Later, the layout of the magazine became more cerebral and less visually experimental (although the typefaces in which it was set remained exploratory and visionary). This shift in *Emigre's* attitude coincided, more or less, with my own decision to go the other way, to engage design in a publicly outward, rather than professionally inward, manner through my work at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum.

Abbott and I own nearly every issue of *Emigre*, squirreled away at different levels within the archeological strata of our lives and libraries. It is deeply moving to think that this open-ended, ever-changing stream of discourse will come to a stop, reaching, at last, the closure of a work.

Someone should go back and study the life history of this remarkable, influential, original, and eccentric publication, for it is our own history.

Best wishes to you,

ELLEN LUPTON, *Baltimore, MD*

Dear *Emigre*,

The first time I ever saw *Emigre*, I was 14 years old. Behind the monitor of my scanning station in downtown Minneapolis was a dog-eared copy of issue #21 about student work from CalArts. I picked it up because it was an attractive shade of bright green. Words—I didn't yet think about anything as "type"—crammed the spine. It reminded me of the First Avenue club posters I saw on my walk to work. The students were not that much older than me.

DEAR EMIGRE

Around the same time, I'd discovered the Walker Art Center. I saw the green issue in the bookstore, along with several others. As I read more, I realized that its subject was the world that yielded it. I had read my father's copy of "Six Characters in Search of an Author," and I thought of *Emigre* in much the same way. Several summers later, I found issue #31, "Raising Voices," where I first read about Yale and Michael Rock, who would be my teacher there.

As *Emigre* concludes, many people will write about the legacy it has left. For me, it's personal. The magazine was there at a time in my life when I was eager to experience things differently, and I share this experience with other designers in my generation. Whatever its critical contributions have been, for me it was more of a sustained series of encounters with characters whose authority came from the forum that they themselves had created. It was tremendously exciting to watch, and, ultimately, to take part in myself. There are some who will suggest that blogs will take *Emigre's* critical place. Perhaps. But for those who wish to be thrilled by the best actors of the day, the next stage is not nearly so apparent.

ROB GIAMPIETRO, *New York, NY*

Dear Emigre,

With *Emigre* magazine you have made an invaluable contribution to typography. With the format getting smaller and smaller over the years, it already seemed to be disappearing slowly. I can understand your final move, but do regret it, as there are so few who will do what you have done. *Emigre* is one of the few publications of which I have all the copies. I had hoped to be able to add to the collection. But it is a monument as it is.

GERARD UNGER, *Bussum, Netherlands*

Dear Emigre,

The intellectuals are gone and design finally hit the wall. The buzz has faded to a deafening, depth-defying ambiance.

The anticlimactic design climate in which we exist today demands renewal. It demands self-definition, firmness about one's position as a maker of things seen and disseminated in a culture. The

field appears sympathetic to design but it keeps us on a very short leash. It would seem that design education is of little consequence (or relevance) when breadth of thinking is always curtailed to ensure that we abide by what seems to be the inevitable rules of practice. These rules are presumed to be absolutes set by economic forces that are often explained to be more important than self-expression, which means zero experimentation. Mute, in other words. Designers have already relinquished edge for edgelessness because clients like the work to be well behaved. Those of us working in especially small venues away from cultural centers can attest to this. Democratization of the field led to some interesting work but the landscape's level now. We live in a *de-signed* culture hewn by insipid rationalizations. In this climate, self-definition is a trifle. Why bother when the point is to do as you're told? It's a travesty that field inculcation constitutes a diminishing of one's will and vision. For now, design is conciliation, not innovation. You might have changed that.

Sadly, after more than two decades, you'll cease publishing but you leave us with unanswered questions. Personally, I wonder if theory and practice can ever be reconciled? *Criticism?* How, when we fail to see beyond the pull of our own penchants and references? *Theory?* Of little consequence while practitioners and educators continue to believe it's impractical—when we keep looking to the field for validation. *Discourse?* We'd have to see past deadlines and field demands first but none of us can ever seem to afford that or want to. So what have we learned from you?

While you offer no definitive answers to these questions, your incisive articles, fonts and books represent the epitome of an original, pioneering spirit. The magazine sustained the postmodern buzz that energized us. But, while your pages ask the tough questions, your products also propagate the notion of design as commodity, which confirms that we may never be able to function un beholden to market forces. You propel consumerism just as much as you question it. Still, you manage to prove that there is joy to be had—and indeed room to be made in culture—for projects as speculative as music and type design. Your fonts represent the *zeit-*

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geist but I can't say that I fully comprehend the motivations behind them. While changes in both content and readership might be compelling enough reasons to make new typefaces and test-run them in your pages, the absence of hardcore scholarship to address needs beyond creative impulse make them somewhat questionable. Take Fairplex for instance: is it anything more than an endearing yet paradoxical mix of references (Garamond and baseball jersey aesthetics)? Interestingly, I think the font works best as an Emigre metaphor: renegade yet respectful of the past—but not slavishly, informed by contemporary methods with welcome aspirations at reshaping and realizing a brighter future. Despite which, Fairplex is very well behaved. Are its formal qualities indicative of a new process? Is this process one you've defined or is it the sum of what you've determined the field is willing to accept? You fought admirably to sustain your vision but, in the end, the market held her sway, which can plainly be seen by both your physical transformation and your decision to finally sell advertising space.

That's quite a load you've carried. Your story, in essence, is the story of a small shop's unrelenting desire to ask questions while inventing new forms. Your maverick pages are an expression of your beliefs and principles despite—and perhaps because of—the risks involved, as well as the contradictions that inevitably surface to challenge your efficacy. And isn't risk-taking and path-paving the point after all?

Sounds like design to me.

You'll be missed.

ANTHONY INCIONG, *Englishtown, NJ*

Dear Emigre,

In the late nineteen-eighties when I first encountered *Emigre* magazine, I came to believe that Rudy VanderLans was Moses, and that *Emigre* magazine would show me the promised land. And, in fact, Emigre showed me my future. It was between the pages of *Emigre* magazine that I first learned of Cranbrook Academy of Art. *Emigre* magazine was a visionary publication, profiling emerging work from the fringe of the graphic design world. As a young designer

frustrated by the ceaseless grind of an increasingly conservative corporate world, confounded by the seemingly monolithic nature of the New York design scene, *Emigre* was a shaft of light from heaven. It was through the oversized canary yellow pages of this strange magazine (*Emigre* #19) that I began to see the possibility of another kind of existence. I began to see a new path for my professional life. I can see now that the tendrils of my current life extend back through the pages of *Emigre* magazine. It may sound dramatic, but it's true. *That's* what a magazine should do! I imagine that *Emigre* magazine plays the same role in my life that *Rolling Stone* has played in many professional musicians' lives. A magazine should transport you! It should give you a window into another world! It should stir the imagination! Without a hint of exaggeration, I can tell you that *Emigre* magazine was all this and more to me.

Emigre magazine is dead and the blogs have killed you. I'll play a funeral dirge for you. Before the "Attack of the Clones," (I mean, the rise of the blogs), publishing an independent magazine was an endeavor fraught with risk. *Emigre* was at the center of the graphic design discourse as a result of Rudy and Zuzana's courage, commitment, and cash. Why is *Emigre* magazine gone? I would suggest that *Emigre* is no longer with us for two simple reasons, one good and one bad. The good: *Emigre* magazine was run as a true psychic extension of its editor, Rudy VanderLans. The magazine grew and evolved with Rudy's interests. This was its great strength. The readership may have had trouble keeping up. The bad: *Emigre* magazine failed to adapt to the rise of the blogs. Given its history, this is a shock. Zuzana's typography and its use inside *Emigre* magazine was the direct result of visionary use of technology. Even before the web, *Emigre* was one of the first companies to sell digital type online through its "Now Serving" BBS. *Emigre* magazine's failure to embrace blog technology contributed to its downfall. The discourse was stolen not by a few visionaries with commitment and courage, but by the great leveling wheels of the Internet. *Emigre* magazine suffered a sort of "death by a thousand cuts (blogs)." and for this I'm deeply saddened. More power,

ELLIOTT EARLS, Bloomfield Hills, MI

DEAR EMIGRE

Dear Emigre,

I believe that if it weren't for your fine magazine I would not be writing you to-day. Well, damn it, clearly such is the case, for in what other volume would I be writing if these very words are at this moment readable in the self-same magazine to which I refer? You see, even as I write I fall victim to confusion, which is not my intent. I write to you in earnest, having heard of your decision to cease publication and so will, on the occasion of the conclusion of the obsession that is *Emigre*, press on. With little more than my own words as proof, delivered in the thin-voiced clumsiness that regret engenders, I set about the task of expressing two facts. First, as I have stated, if not for your magazine I would not be writing here. Truth be told I might not be writing, even might not have written, elsewhere either. Having said that, I find courage to state the second more shameful fact—doubtless a confession so as to free my elder years from pangs of guilt. Please be informed that your magazine's demise is, and I am sure of this, all my fault.

In the beginning of our association I was loath to tell you something, and still my fingers are reluctant. But here, dear editor—as your doors pinch out the last sliver of light—is the final truth: I do not know how to write. Let not this shock cast doubt as to the soundness of your judgment. You are not to blame. You, with your curiosity, and your comfort with the edge, and your buoyant questions that if not for my incompetence might have kept your magazine afloat for decades to come. But it is I, the architect of your wretchedness, I designer (dare I say Monster!) who, with boundless ego, took advantage of your open-mindedness. So, do not deny yourself forbearance. Take to heart instead that, in the end, it is I who shall suffer most the certain, impending void.

Call me.

DENISE GONZALES CRISP (for **DEBORAH GRIFFIN**), *Raleigh, NC*

Dear Emigre,

I'm not concerned about the passing of *Emigre*. Not at all.

Of course, I've had more than 12 years to prepare myself.

When I interviewed Rudy VanderLans in 1992 for my *Print* fea-

ture, "Kicking Up a Little Dust," he was resolute in declaring that he'd easily abandon his magazine once it became boring for him.

In those days, no one considered *Emigre* boring. In less than a decade of existence, it had become both popular and provocative for producing texts and graphics that assaulted Modernism, traditional legibility, and even the whole graphic design profession. Amazingly, Rudy accepted even the most acerbic criticism with good-natured humor. When I'd ask how he felt about accusations of self-indulgence he laughed, "*Emigre* is a *tremendously* self-indulgent magazine!"

A year after that article appeared, *Eye* published "The Cult of the Ugly," Steven Heller's scathing, finger-pointing opinion piece. *Output*, a Cranbrook student publication, was Frankenstein monster ugly. Ed Fella's gallery announcements were dead-end ugly. Jeffery Keedy's typeface LushUS was an affront to typographic standards. Rudy and the rebels he featured were simply not engaged in viable visual communication.

For those whose knowledge went no further than my *Print* article and Steve's *Eye* piece, which were reprinted in Allworth's first *Looking Closer* anthology, these were the last words on the topic. But that was hardly the end of the dialogue.

When Steve's critique first ran, I was eager to investigate how this new design experimentation had achieved such cult status. The result was *Emigre* #30, "Fallout," debates in the form of interviews with Steve, Jeff, Ed, and *Output*'s David Shields. Steve advocated respect for the limits of graphic design while the others argued for the overthrow of fixed ideology.

The immediate fallout from "Fallout," from Andrew Blauvelt, Gunnar Swanson, Teal Triggs, Martin Venezky and many others, appeared in the following *Emigre*, "Raising Voices," in letter, essay, and interview form. The degree of heat that had been generated was astonishing.

Shortly afterwards, Rick Poynor wrote an *Eye* Monitor column, "Ugliness is in the Eye of the Beholder," meant to summarize and conclude the subject. In part, he took exception to my handling of the matter. His primary objection was to the interview format: "An

essay would have allowed a tighter focus on the issues at stake and would have amounted to a much clearer statement of Dooley's (and *Emigre's*?) position."

I had, in fact, originally promised Rudy an essay. But in the course of talking with my subjects I became much more interested in the less transient, more far-reaching concerns that emerged, such as design writing, criticism, education, and, again, self-indulgence. Plus, an expansive, rather than reductive, approach seemed suitable to what had become a discussion about aesthetic relativism.

Rick's preference for a definitive editorial resolution overlooked Rudy's desire, stated in my *Print* article and elsewhere, to abandon hidebound rules in favor of a creative pluralism. I mailed a letter to *Eye* in my defense, my response to Rick's response to Steve's, Jeff's, Ed's, and David's responses to my questions, which were in response to Steve's response to "ugly" design. It never saw print. And Rick's commentary became an unchallenged part of his *Design Without Boundaries* compilation, again a final statement of sorts.

In the late eighties and early nineties the design community had become galvanized in unprecedented numbers, and argued with intense passion. But revolution eventually leads to resolution, and Steve's viewpoint began to shift even within the course of our interview. Soon afterwards he informed me he'd warmed up to Jeff's hitherto-"abominable" font. He went on to commission *N.Y. Times Book Review* section headers from Ed and to title his survey of *avant-garde* magazines *MERZ to EMIGRE and Beyond*.

Since the dust has settled, everyone now engages in relatively mundane blog chats about branding and such. So I'm neither surprised nor mournful about *Emigre's* demise. I'm positive the voices and visions Rudy, Zuzana, and their many collaborators have created since 1984 will continue to be rediscovered and respected far into our future.

No regrets.

Only gratitude.

MICHAEL DOOLEY, Pasadena, CA

Dear Emigre,

With this your *denouement*, it's tempting not to offer a nostalgic reprise of your achievements over the last two decades. I'll also resist the temptation to reflect on the ominous nature of the year of your founding (1984), the genesis of the Macintosh desktop publishing revolution that would soon wreak havoc on the careers of typesetters and designers worldwide. It's difficult to erase from our memories the crisis unleashed by the bitmapping aesthetic you actively precipitated, or the relaxed layout strategies that owed more to some young designers from Rotterdam than it did to the sun-baked "punk" graphics of your adopted California. I remember those moments of categorical schizophrenia when *Emigre* positioned and repositioned itself, first as a cultural *ingénue*, then as an alt-music promoter, all the while clinging to its roots as an exercise in graphic design and typography. As an independent venture years before the current DIY movement, *Emigre* did not seem beholden to the vagaries of a market-driven, focus-group-tested, advertising-dependent publication. In the wake of the current niche-driven magazine world (where one recent article states there were more than 1,000 new magazine launches in 2004 and further recommends aspiring entrepreneurs have at least \$1 million in start-up funds.), I recall Rudy's candid proclamation that *Emigre* was a magazine whose audience found it; a field-of-dreams ethos whose enthusiasm was contagious.

The desolate nature of graphic design publishing and criticism in the 1980s should not be forgotten—just imagine a place where a feature or profile in *Print* magazine was tantamount to making it and *Graphis* was revered mainly for its impeccable print quality. The original oversized tabloid format of *Emigre*, which was printed in only one or two colors, was tangible evidence of what graphic design publishing could be—a provocative counterpoint to all of the professional gloss. But could a magazine really sustain itself on the very materiality of its own publishing? Apparently not, but that has not stopped many designers from doing the same thing. The physical downsizing and authorial outsourcing of *Emigre* followed the logic of the ensuing decade; sobriety yes, seductiveness

no. As a direct beneficiary of these changes, however, I can say that the “giving-voice-to-others” function of the latter-day *Emigre* enabled at least the possibility of reading (and writing) against the grain, even if its diminutive package was occasionally mistaken for a J.Crew catalog. If the original *Emigre* instigated the legibility wars (in the end just a rehash of formalist-ensconced dogma), I’d like to think the later, more bookish, editions incited the readability skirmishes evinced by all of those letters-to-the-editor bemoaning the uppity attitude and dictionary-dependent style of the writers. Therefore, I remember fondly the different roles you’ve played over the years: cultural bohemian, agent *provocateur*, *enfant terrible*, *petite bourgeoisie*, earnest cultural critic, practical intellectual, and contrarian dreamer. Each guise had its distinct advantages, although the eponymous nature of *Emigre* was always at odds with the praise (and thus acceptance) bestowed on it from the insider nature of the design world. Of course, its title was always predicated on the notion of leaving rather than arriving on the scene. Given this mentality, perhaps it is only fitting that we focus not on the demise of one thing, but its departure. After all of the questions and answers posed by *Emigre*, there remains only one: What or who will occupy the place that *Emigre* leaves?

ANDREW BLAUVELT, *Minneapolis, MN*

Dear Emigre,
On 69.

Sixty-nine is an interesting number. Apart from referring to a certain sexual position and resembling the zodiac sign for Cancer, it is a number that has always stood for the idea of revolving and revolution. In occult circles, 69 takes on sheer magical proportions: in chapter 69 of *The Book of Lies* (1913), Aleister Crowley refers to the number as the “Holy Hexagram” (the title of this particular chapter, “The Way to Succeed and The Way to Suck Eggs,” is another reference to the famous sexual position).

Likewise, the year of ’69 can be seen as a year of revolving and revolution: in 1969 (the “dawning of the Age of Aquarius,” so to speak), the Flower Power movement made a complete turnaround,

and showed its more sinister side. Two iconic examples of this sudden reversal were the killing of Meredith Hunter by Hell's Angels during the Altamont Speedway festival (as graphically captured on the Maysles brothers' documentary *Gimme Shelter*) and the Tate/LaBianca murders by the Manson Family.

So how does this all relate to issue #69 of *Emigre*? Where, in this final issue, can we locate a sense of reversal? To be honest, there isn't really any relation yet, and a sense of reversal is probably nowhere to be found—but with some small effort, we can change that. Just bear with us, as we demonstrate how to go from *Emigre* to *Remigre*—in 69 steps.

Our proposal to you, the reader, is to keep *Emigre* running by reading all back issues in reverse. Just consider the final *Emigre* you're holding right now (issue #69) as the first issue. In a few months time, start reading issue #68. A few months after that, reread issue #67. Keep continuing this process until, somewhere around the year 2025, you'll find yourself reading issue #1. This way, the lifetime of *Emigre* will be doubled, and turned into an epic symmetrical diptych, with issue #69 in the middle.

"But why?" we hear you ask. "Why this systematic rereading of *Emigre*?" Well, to give one reason, it might be interesting to see which articles will stand the test of time. For example, which pieces were imaginative, creative, truly trying to show things in a new way, and which pieces were unoriginal, undialectical, only echoing mainstream cynicism? Which articles were truly critiquing the products of the culture industry, and which articles were mere products of the critique industry? Which writers were honestly trying to construct new connections and uncover old ones (such as the brilliant pop-cultural connections in Greil Marcus's *Lipstick Traces*, or the witty associations in Roland Barthes's *Mythologies*), and which writers were just showcasing their cultural pessimism as one big muscular heroic pose? Which "responding readers" were saying interesting things about mundane topics, and which were saying mundane things about interesting topics? In short, who were the real critics, and who were the uncritics?

Only time will tell. And as we all know, time's lips are sealed; to

make it talk, you need to intimidate time a little. Anachronistic behavior is a good way to twist time's arm just enough. So why not start right here and now, by treating this issue of *Emigre* not as the last one—but as the first one.

EXPERIMENTAL JETSET, *Amsterdam, Netherlands*

Dear Emigre:

Is this a magazine or a type foundry?

Although this is ostensibly the last issue of the magazine, the name *Emigre* will always be synonymous with a unique convergence of independent publishing and type design. Like most remarkable convergences, this one owes a lot to serendipity. In the early 1980s the Macintosh made it possible for individuals to independently distribute typefaces. It also made desktop publishing possible. Thousands of people began to experiment with one or the other of these new tools, but by combining the two, *Emigre* became culturally significant and commercially viable.

This hybrid venture seamlessly merged critical investigation and practical business venture. The magazine rigorously interrogated the founders' conversion to the Macintosh. The challenges they faced producing typefaces digitally and designing a magazine on the computer, along with their belief that this technology could help them achieve independence, turned out to be emblematic of a generation of designers. Chronicling the controversy and awkwardness (not to mention the occasional sublime moments) of this transition to digital design gave *Emigre* its critical mission and put it in the vanguard of design publications.

Emigre typefaces were the perfect vessel for this critical mission. Not necessarily because of their form, but because the process of producing and distributing them gave the critique an authentic perspective based on practical experience. The magazine promoted the typefaces and the typefaces made the magazine a design artifact as well as a critical record. The text informed the typefaces, which in turn gave the magazine a level of credibility among designers that critique alone could not have inspired.

This is not to say there haven't been missteps. Once the revolu-

tion of the Macintosh subsided, *Emigre* fumbled with how to engage other emerging technologies. Their foray into the DVD format lacked the depth and the conviction of their earlier issues. Their play for wide distribution and advertising dollars that began with issue #42 seemed more a response to a booming economy than to a critical issue in design practice. The magazine did not offer an authoritative critique of the Internet revolution and has left the world of blogs to others. *Emigre* has certainly responded more fluidly than most publications to a tremendous series of changes, but the fact is, these other developments did not speak to the core of *Emigre*—the confluence of magazine and typeface design. In a sense, the founders' serendipity caught up with them. There simply hasn't been anything like the rise of the Macintosh, which created both critical issues for designers and startlingly new visual forms.

The combination of type design and independent publishing is so significant because it goes to the core purpose of graphic design—amplifying the human voice through technology. What is unique about *Emigre* is that the voices it chose to amplify were those of their fellow designers, many of them young and unproven (like myself). *Emigre* has not only been a model for how to merge formal exploration with critical inquiry; it has provided a platform for others to do so. The convergence of critical and technological moments will undoubtedly happen again. When it does, let's hope there is a publication as generous and energetic as *Emigre* to embody it.

DMITRI SIEGEL, *Brooklyn, NY*

Dear *Emigre*,

I enjoy starting my writings by referencing random elements of life—cockroaches, Larry Bird, kittens, etc.—that help me segue into serious arguments. A sort of throat clearing. Finding something for *Emigre* has proved difficult. A song, a movie, a fruit, a brand (ha!)... Nothing matches. *Emigre*'s intense nature is hard to compare.

I did find an appropriate metaphor and rather than weave it

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subtly I will deploy it ungracefully until you can't separate the metaphored from the metaphoree. Ready?

Emigre is like New York City's subway trains.

Emigre's writers are comparable to subway passengers. Some are regulars: you get used to seeing them and when you don't, you worry if they are okay; if you pay attention you notice when they get a haircut or change points of view. Others are random, bringing a breath of fresh air and a new perspective... unless they are drunk, unruly, or with a weak portfolio, in which case their contributions can be questionable and you wonder who let them in.

Depending on your luck, your experience on the train will vary, much like with an issue of *Emigre*. Possible uncertainties include but are not limited to: a smooth and critical journey; a crowded train with too many opinions; a surprisingly empty car until you realize it's the smell or the inconsequence of the writing that keeps people away; you may witness a fight, a woman going into labor, a designer waxing intellectual, an outsider challenging your well-guarded profession and/or a really weird DVD.

Like the subway, *Emigre* has been covered in graffiti, arrogance, piss, criticism, beer, and "theory," yet has managed to maintain a steady (loyal?) crowd, perhaps because of necessity, perhaps because there is no other way to get from here to there in this town. *Emigre* has carried us through floods, terrorist attacks, technical malfunctions, and creative droughts. Sadly, this is the end of the line. All passengers must get off the train now.

Thanks for the ride.

ARMIN VIT, *Brooklyn, NY*

Dear *Emigre*,

Emigre is history.

Every discipline depends on polemical work and writing. Professional practice tends toward stasis. So often, the realities of clients, schedules, and budgets preoccupy even the most competent practicing designers and constrain exploration. From time to time something stirs things up—the *First Things First* manifesto being the most dramatic in recent years. But *Emigre* has proved to

be a more long-term and significant force. Its vigorous and irreverent content challenged much that was held sacred by the best of current practice. To the frequent ire of some very visible design professionals and educators, *Emigre* regularly raised issues and provoked change. Yet what initially aroused anger soon found its way into the mainstream of professional design practice.

Emigre's impact points to the importance of change agents in design. Not change for the sake of change, but change for the sake of growth. After all, graphic design is still a very young field, far less than a century old. Although design had developed a healthy plateau of form and method when *Emigre* entered the scene, there was much more exploration waiting to happen, catalyzed by new technologies, economies, and social conditions. *Emigre* jumped into the fray.

In those same years, architecture was a few steps ahead of graphic design, experiencing somewhat parallel upheavals. Modernism was happily ensconced when Robert Venturi's groundbreaking books, *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* (1966) and *Learning from Las Vegas* (1972), pushed for change. A stream of alternative visions followed, most notably the "paper architecture" movement. Maverick architects, including John Hejduk, Daniel Libeskind, Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry and Morphosis, published radically different drawings and writings that rocked the architecture world. Eventually even the Museum of Modern Art recognized these new influences in its 1988 *Deconstructivist Architecture* exhibition of polemical drawings and models. Today those same architects are actually building their edgy visions, and enjoy an abundance of clients and professional honors. More to the point, that work is now broadly accepted and imitated widely in mainstream architectural practice. The polemic becomes popular, only to be challenged by the next new vision in a continuous and productive cycle, with each new movement standing on (and beating at) the shoulders of the previous paradigm.

Graphic design experienced a similar rebellion against Modernism and *Emigre* was instrumental. One wonders if this was a conscious VanderLans agenda, or more a matter of sensing where the

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action was. Looking back at the sequence of *Emigre* issues, it is clear that the editor had a great nose for new ideas. The publication served as an effective platform for polemic, introducing work and thinking that was disobedient to the norms and accepted practice of the day. *Emigre* made a significant contribution to the evolution of our field.

What will graphic design do without *Emigre*? The good news is that there is much more to read about graphic design today than twenty years ago. More designers express themselves in writing and there are more design publications, ranging from thoughtful academic journals and glossy professional magazines to AIGA's web-based *VOICE* and numerous Internet blogs of varying levels of seriousness and depth.

Perhaps the blogs are filling *Emigre*'s role as places for alternative voices. But their long-term contribution remains to be seen, since they are missing key elements of *Emigre*. At this point, blog writing is a fairly ephemeral form of publishing, preserved only as long as someone maintains the server. Copies of *Emigre*, on the other hand, are cherished. They occupy thousands of bookshelves around the world and command significant prices in the rare and used book market. Later *Emigre* issues enjoyed the status of an ISBN number. More importantly, design blogs are largely unedited, whereas *Emigre* enjoyed the light but sure hand and editorial eye of Rudy VanderLans, who always demanded a level of rigor and refinement from his authors. While many celebrate the spontaneity and grassroots democracy of blog dialogues, the vision of an enlightened editor is a rare thing—and a great publishing tradition. That upstart *Emigre* now looks like a venerable institution.

KATHERINE MCCOY, Buena Vista, CO

Dear *Emigre*,

The end of an era. No. Make that another end of another era; I'm far from the only one to have noticed a variety of reincarnations of *Emigre*. I'm also not the only one hoping for another. After all, comebacks are as central to the American legend as immigrants. "*Emigre* #70: Rudy & Zuzana vs. Jason & Chucky" has a nice ring.

(Come on. Don't pretend you weren't thinking of that genre when you featured Nick Bell's slasher typeface in *Emigre* #22 or Gail Swanlund's KichenAid submachine gun cover for *Emigre* #28.)

It was never sure what stuff you showed us because you thought it was important or inspirational; I always suspected that some things were in *Emigre* because, like a horror movie, they were simultaneously ugly and funny yet somehow compelling. Wes Craven never managed to convince me that I wanted to look. You did.

Thanks.

GUNNAR SWANSON, *Ventura, CA*

Dear *Emigre*,

My burger has been cleared away. I'm at Daisy's Diner on Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn, finally getting down to this invitation to contribute to the final issue, and I'm panicked. This is due on Monday, leaving me tomorrow to edit and/or completely rewrite. It is now 12:35, past midnight, and the burger was a cheeseburger deluxe and I've just opted out of the Coke refill. The panic is what I've been waiting for, that mode of hurry and fear that signals it is time to quit farting around and get to work.

I've left this to the eleventh hour because, like everyone else, I've been busy. Which is to say, everything is constantly moving past while I hang on as best I can, which is often like trying to ride a log downstream, and forget about staying dry. But then, just plain being a citizen is busier and more complex than it's ever been. We all know all about it.

And so in the course of all this, *Emigre* is ceasing publication. *Emigre* that I detested in 1994 long before I was a graphic designer. *Emigre* that was so computerfied, when the tools were too crude to produce historical facsimiles, so everything looked truly, natively digital. *Emigre* that seemed sometimes like a schizophrenic holding a mirror up to another schizophrenic. *Emigre* that was at the same time hideous and generous, classical and fractured, indeterminate. *Emigre* that was making me start to worry that, at 25 years old, I was hopelessly conservative when it came to my own tastes and I should really do something about that and lighten up

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fer crissakes. *Emigre* that, by the time I was reading back issues for design school, was an institution, or so it seemed. *Emigre* that has been, I think I'm only realizing this now, that has been the publication that values writing as a form of intellectual exploration in its own right, as much as the graphic. *Emigre* that was debate in the literary sense, that was portable and paper and annotatable. *Emigre* that will be gone, unmatched online, definitive of its times.

Tomorrow there will be files to prepare for the printer, pages to set, last week's emails, and a contract to revise—a Sunday, alas—and the whole operation will shuffle into action again. There will be plenty to feel obligated to read and there will be a lot of new stuff, and like always, I'll never really know what to think until the height of it passes by. For now, it is time to go home and sleep off this feeling of yesterday, with just a moment of concentrated gratitude to Rudy, Zuzana, and all the contributors over the years. It already feels like a definite era: the *Emigre* years. We kind of know what that means. We may not yet feel how much it means, but for certain it means something. Something significant and solid, something from the past that is always passing us by.

Thanks,

SAM POTTS, *Brooklyn, NY*

Dear *Emigre*,

It seems a bit paradoxical that my first letter to you is to appear in the last issue to be published. I have been your loyal reader since the early 1990s. I grew up with the magazine, dismissed it, and came back to it many times. The magazine has been celebrated by many, and also received its share of criticism—a sign that it all really mattered.

When we started *Dot Dot Dot* in 2000, we produced a pilot issue concerned with mapping the graphic design publications of the past and present. We compiled information, a sort of encyclopedia of design periodicals, in order to examine the fates of our predecessors. Besides this encyclopedia we wrote articles about a few selected magazines that were particularly influential for us at the point of starting up a new, at that time completely undefined, mag-

azine. *Emigre* was amongst the seven selected magazines. Another one was the legendary Dutch magazine *Hard Werken*, which was *Emigre*'s inspiration at the time of its start in 1984. Without stretching it too far, I see a link between *Emigre*, *Hard Werken* and *DDD*, and I doubt that *DDD* would even exist if they hadn't.

The original idea of *DDD* was to do something that *Emigre* had been doing long before: to give designers a place not only to express their ideas in forms of contributions, but also to offer them an opportunity to articulate their ideas visually. To be truthful, we thought that the articles would be designed exclusively by their authors, which was the case until about our second issue, when we became fascists in our design approach and never gave the contributors a chance to design their articles again.

How does one judge a magazine? By the number of circulated copies? By the richness of the content? By the reader's reactions? By the quality of the writing? By the professional discussion that it stimulates? *Emigre* has had it all; not all at the same time, but in certain phases, it has had a circulation larger than most trade magazines and pages filled with readers' reactions. It has stirred up the public debate about the position of the profession. It has reincarnated several times. Of course the magazine has also had its midlife crisis, as all living creatures do. But the simple fact that a magazine basically run by a single person still exists is incredible.

To be honest, I've wondered before how a magazine like *Emigre* would end one day. Of course it has to do with the fact that I know that our magazine will end one day, too. Unlike other publications with large publishing support, *Emigre* has had the luxury of choosing the time of its end rather than being pushed to it by external forces. It takes a sense of timing to find the right time, to try what the magazine still needs to try.

Apparently now is the time. As usual, I am looking forward most to reading Rudy's condensed and candid editorial, which has been usually more to the point than a number of lengthier contributions.

And I will wonder what else he's still got up his sleeve.

Thanks, *Emigre*,

PETER BILAK, *The Hague, Netherlands*



Emigre office, Berkeley, California, 1987.

EMIGRE PRODUCT INFO

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Emigre warehouse, Emeryville, California, 2005.

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HOW TO BE A GRAPHIC DESIGNER, WITHOUT LOSING YOUR SOUL

ADRIAN SHAUGHNESSY

NOVEMBER 2005

7.5 × 9 IN / 160 PP

20 B+W ILLUSTRATIONS

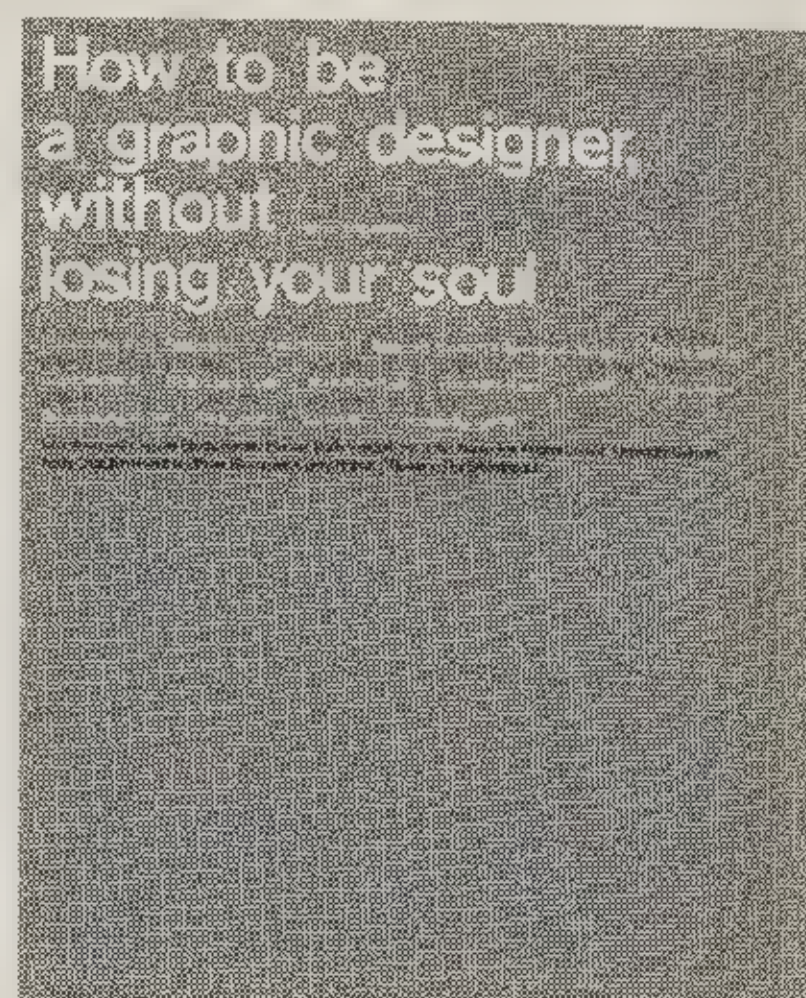
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ISBN 1-56898-559-2

How to be a graphic designer, without losing your soul addresses the concerns of young designers who want to earn a living by doing expressive and meaningful work, and who want to avoid becoming hired drones working on soulless projects. Combining practical advice with philosophical guidance, it covers just about every aspect of the profession. Written by a designer for designers, *How to be a graphic designer, without losing your soul* stands as an indispensable guide to the professional practice of design.

Including interviews with Neville Brody, Natalie Hunter, Rudy VanderLans, John Warwicker, Angela Lorenz, Alexander Gelman, Andy Cruz, Kim Hiorthoy, Peter Stemmler, and Corey Holms.



"I hope this book helps young designers find their way. I don't think that the 'designers don't read' bullshit is true. A good book will find good readers."

—Stefan Sagmeister

Table of Contents:

Foreword by Stefan Sagmeister / Introduction / Attributes needed by the modern designer / How to find a job / Being freelance / Setting up a studio / Running a studio / Winning new work / Clients / Self-promotion / The creative process / Bibliography / Appendix

ROBERT BROWNJOHN SEX AND TYPOGRAPHY

EMILY KING

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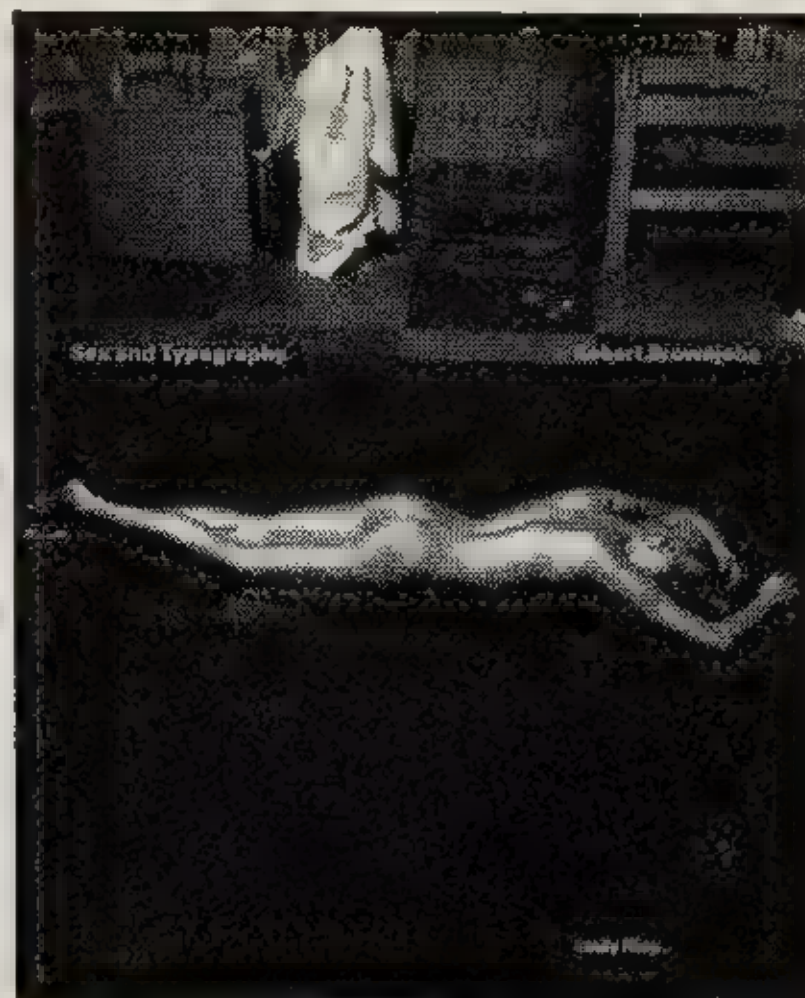
HARDCOVER

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"Brownjohn often told the tale of how he had sold the idea for the credit sequence for *From Russia With Love*: he turned on a slide projector, lifted his shirt and danced in front of the beam of light, allowing projected images to glance off his already alcohol-extended belly. 'It'll be just like this,' he exclaimed, 'except we'll use a pretty girl!'" —Emily King

The design profession doesn't produce many larger-than-life figures. Robert Brownjohn—BJ, to just about everyone who knew him, and everyone did—was one. His gifts were immense, as were his appetites. Enfant terrible and visionary, he was both. Today, he is best remembered for his Rolling Stones *Let It Bleed* album cover and sexy James Bond credit sequences. But Brownjohn's legacy is far more significant, and now, for the first time, this extraordinary life and career is remembered in print, with all its richness and complexity.



DRAWING FROM LIFE THE JOURNAL AS ART

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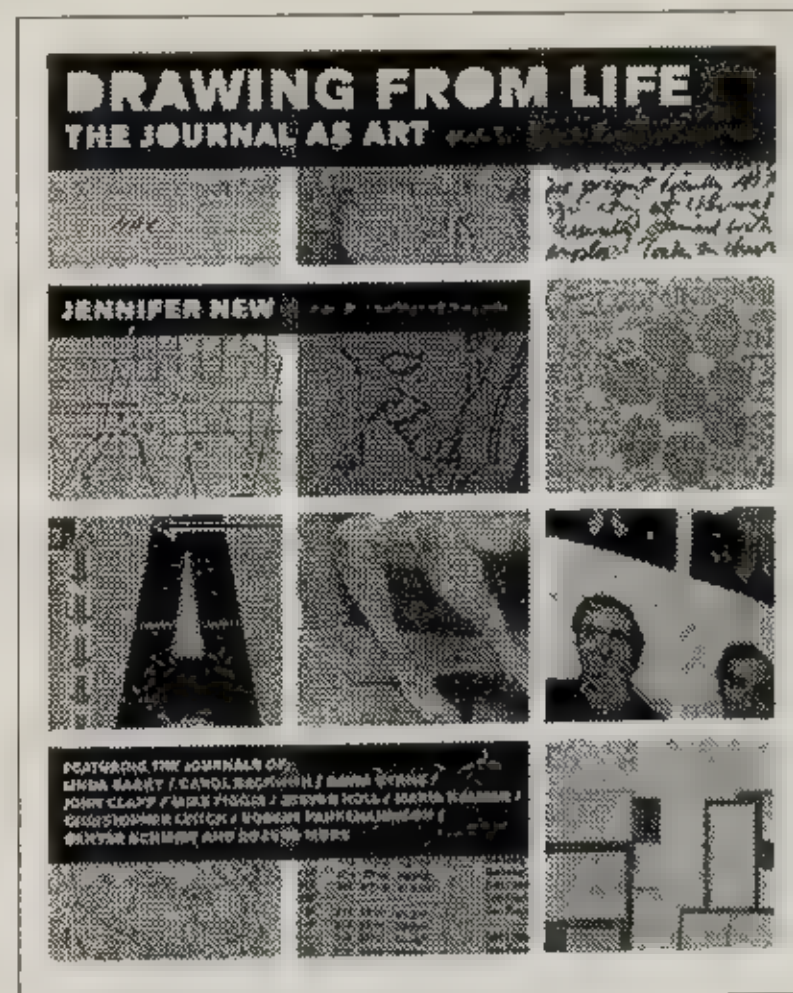
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Who hasn't, at one time or other, kept a journal? The impulse to record our daily lives on paper is nothing if not universal. *Drawing from Life: The Journal as Art* is an exploration of these books of obsessive wonder filled to their borders with drawings, sketches, watercolors, graphs, charts, lists, collages, portraits, and photographs. Author Jennifer New takes readers on a spirited tour into the private worlds of a wildly diverse group of journal keepers illustrating a broad range of journaling styles and techniques. Excerpts from journals by such artists as Maira Kalman, Steven Holl, David Byrne, and Mike Figgis give us a peek at how creative souls observe, reflect, and explore.

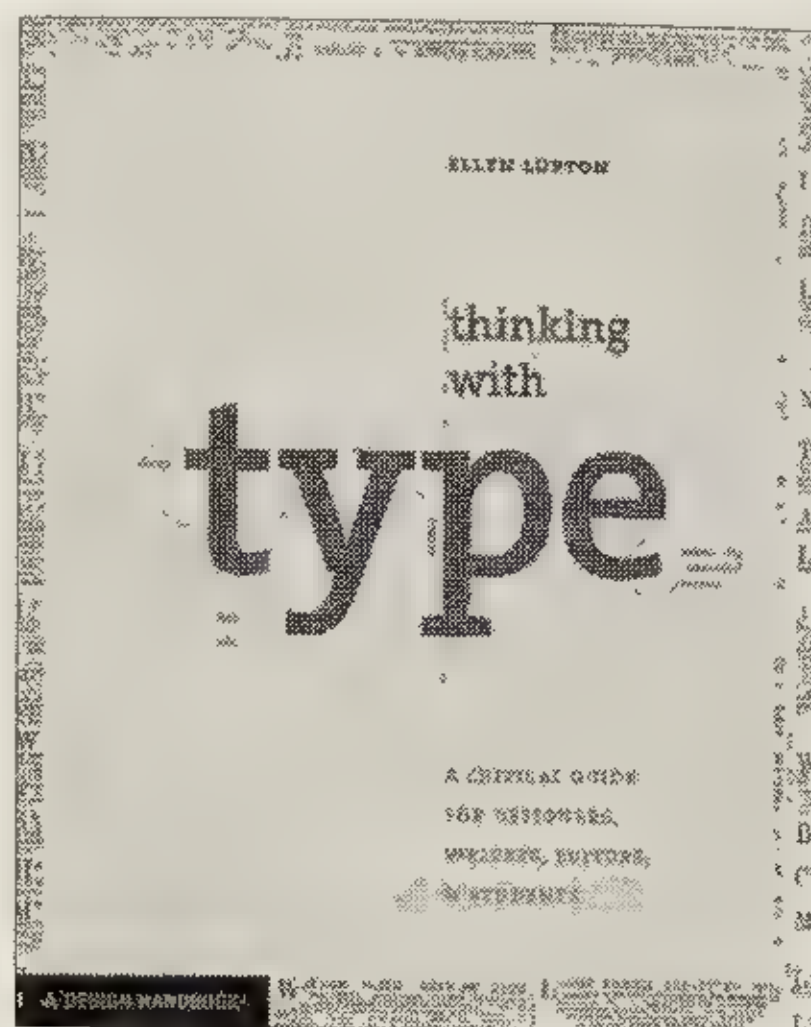


THINKING WITH TYPE
A CRITICAL GUIDE
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ELLEN LUPTON

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The organization of letters on a blank sheet—or screen—is the most basic challenge facing anyone who practices design. What type of font to use? How big? How should those letters, words, and paragraphs be aligned, spaced, ordered, shaped, and otherwise manipulated? In this groundbreaking new primer, leading design educator and historian Ellen Lupton provides clear and concise guidance for anyone learning or brushing up on their typographic skills.

Thinking with Type is divided into three sections: letter, text, and grid. Each section begins with an easy-to-grasp essay that reviews historical, technological, and theoretical concepts and is then followed by a set of practical exercises that bring the material reviewed to life. Sections conclude with examples of work by leading practitioners that demonstrate creative possibilities (along with some classic no-nos to avoid).

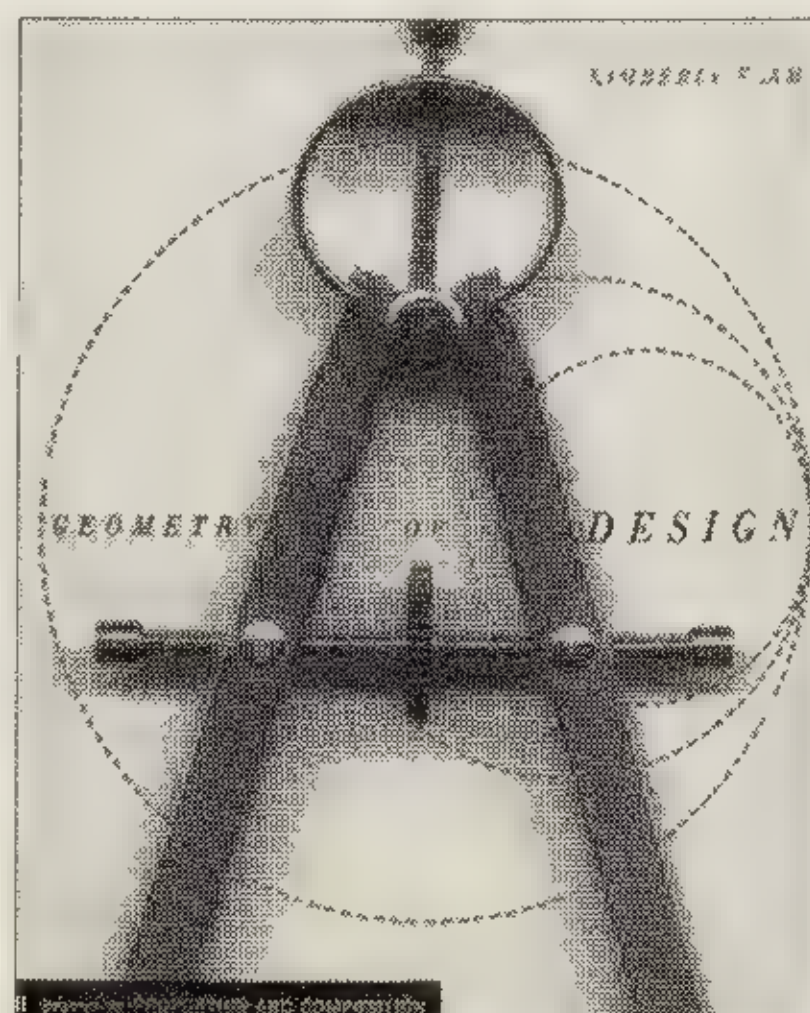


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Kimberly Elam lends insight and coherence to the design process by exploring the visual relationships that have foundations in mathematics as well as the essential qualities of life. *Geometry of Design* takes a close look at a broad range of twentieth-century examples of design, architecture, and illustration—from the Barcelona chair to the Musica Viva poster, from the Braun hand-blender to the Conico kettle—revealing the underlying geometric structures in their compositions.

Explanations and techniques of visual analysis make *Geometry of Design* a must-have for anyone involved in graphic arts.



GRID SYSTEMS

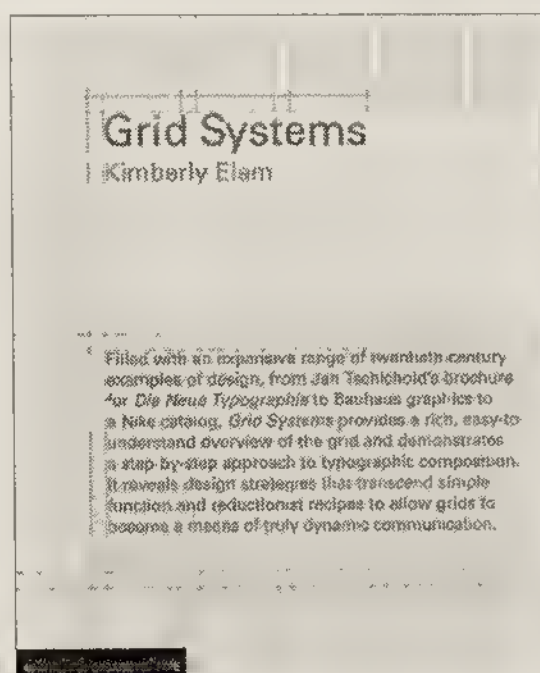
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Filled with extensive research and more than 100 informative examples from the Bauhaus to Nike ads, *Grid Systems* provides a rich, easy-to-understand overview and demonstrates a step-by-step approach to typographic composition. Any designer, educator, or student will benefit greatly from this elegant book, chock-a-block full of colorful examples, helpful vellum overlays, and Elam's insightful analysis.



ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

ROWENA REED KOSTELLOW

AND THE STRUCTURE

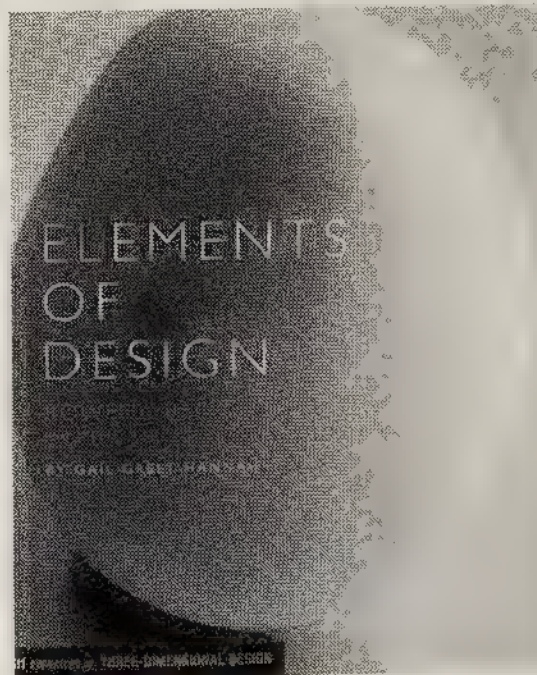
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Everything must come to an end, and after publishing *Emigre* magazine for over 21 years we're both relieved and just a little bit sad to announce that #69 will be our final issue. Inside is a look back on some great years in graphic design, while our contributors and colleagues bid us farewell. It was quite an experience. Thank you for reading *Emigre*.